

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

HIS LIFE AND WORKS



VHPA Camp

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA
HIS LIFE AND WORKS

With excerpts from
“The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda”

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

His Life and Works

The Vision of Vivekananda and the Hindu Renaissance

The Importance of the Vision:

In December, 1892, after two years of wandering as a homeless Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda found himself in Kanyakumari, the extreme southern tip of India. After darshan of the goddess in the temple, he swam to a large rock in the Indian Ocean, a few hundred yards from the shore. There, Vivekananda meditated long on the fallen condition of the Indian nation, the poverty, the misery, and the ignorance of the masses. There he had a vision in which he clearly saw the past glory of his motherland, the present fallen state, and the future greatness.

In this vision, his own mission was made clear to him. He would dedicate his life to the service of his poor and ignorant countrymen. He had become a monk in the pursuit of personal salvation, to have a vision of the Lord. But his own, personal salvation will have to wait. He saw the Lord in the suffering people. The service of these people will be his service to the Lord. He would inspire others, especially the youth of India to take up service of the poor. His goal would be nothing less than the all round renaissance of Bharath; physical, mental, social, and spiritual. At that time, he was all of 28 years of age.

He clearly saw how immense the task would be of resurrecting the wounded physical body of Bharath. In this task, he would seek help from the West. The West had immense wealth and power, seemingly boundless energy. But above all, the West had the knowledge of the physical sciences, and technology. India lacked the very same commodities. The west lacked spirituality, the clear and liberal vision of Vedanta, which India had in abundance. He would take Vedanta to the West, and seek to bring to India the sciences and the organizing capacity of the West. In his mind this was a fair and equitable exchange. Thus was born in his mind the idea of representing Vedanta at the first Parliament of Religions at Chicago, which was to be held the next year.

Vivekananda's vision in Kanyakumari is of immense importance to us Hindus. Our fortunes flipped on that day. For about seven centuries prior to that fateful day, the ancient land had been slumbering, in the depths of dark ages. Faint, uncertain signals that the giant may be waking up were felt by the middle of the 19th century. Two movements, Brahma Samaj in Bengal, on the east coast, and Arya Samaj in the west and north of the country, gave premonitions of a new national awakening. However, their impact would be of limited extent. Brahma Samaj sought to recast Hinduism in a pale imitation of churchy Christianity. Arya Samaj, more orthodox and nationalistic, sought to take the

religion back to the ancient days of Vedic Mantras and of fire sacrifices. It was left to a child-like saint, the Paramahansa of Bengal, to point out the true religious genius of India, the all- inclusive vision of Vedanta.

The Master and the Student:

Sri Ramakrishna appeared at Dakshineswar, in Bengal. In the ancient traditions of Rishis of India, the master had single-mindedly sought God-vision. He attained it after a decade of severe Tapasya, and unswevering devotion to Mother Kali. After this, he practiced the disciplines various Hindu sects as well as the disciplines of Sufi Islam and mystic Christianity. Ramakrishna easily attained the highest ideal of each sect and declared that the various religions were just so many paths to Truth and salvation. The great liberal teachings of the Upanishads came alive in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He validated the truth of different religions by practicing them personally.

When the master was 45 years of age Narendra (the future Vivekananda) met him for the first time. Narendra was eighteen at that time. The eagle eye of the master at once recognized the future prophet of India. There were tremendous energies playing inside Narendra. The young man was completely pure hearted with a firm resolve to attain God vision. Narendra's was a dominating intellect, with unbounded self-confidence, verging on arrogance. The master wanted to engage Narendra's energies in service of Mother's work. He trained Narendra, tamed his wild powers, with great patience and love. Narendra's apprenticeship lasted for five years. Narendra attained the highest Yogic Samadhi under the guidance of the master. The master passed away at the age of 50. However, a few days before his parinirvana, the master, in a great act of sacrifice, passed on all the accumulated powers of his Tapasya to the disciple. He charged Narendra with the task of serving the motherland, i.e., the suffering humanity of Bharath. The master had chosen well. The student was up to the task

The Success of Vivekananda's Mission:

Vivekanand's mission to Chicago parliament was a resounding success. From the moment he spoke the first words at the parliament of religions, he dominated its proceedings. He stayed on in the West for four years preaching Vedanta, and learning the organizing ability of the west. He established Vedanta centers in the USA and in Europe. He met and held discussions with leading personalities of the West, great scientists, professors of philosophy, industrialists, artists, and authors. He made many converts to his cause.

After a hiatus of seven centuries, the voice of Vedanta was heard for the first time outside India. The dark ages had come to an end. A new dawn was on the horizon. The Hindu renaissance had begun. When the news of his successes filtered back to India via news reports and articles in papers, there was great rejoicing. The result was electrifying, thrilling. A great surge of self-confidence passed through the supine body of the ancient

land. The giant had awakened. When Vivekananda returned to India in 1897, the whole nation rose to greet him as a conquering hero. Such a welcome was unprecedented. In quick succession many prominent leaders rose in India in all fields; politics, social reform, the sciences, arts, and literature. The vision of Vivekananda was coming true.

Monday

Swami Vivekananda: Birth and Childhood

"I am indebted to my mother for the efflorescence of my knowledge." -Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was born in Shimla Pally, Calcutta at 6:33 a.m on Monday, 12 January 1863, during the eve of Makra Sankranti festival and was given the name Narendranath Datta. His father Vishwanath Datta was an attorney of Calcutta High Court. He was considered generous, and had a progressive outlook in social and religious



Bhuvaneshwari Devi (1841-1911).

matters. His mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi was pious and had practiced austerities and prayed to Vireshwar Shiva of Varanasi to give her a son. She reportedly had a dream in which Shiva rose from his meditation and said that he would be born as her son.

His thinking and personality were influenced by his parents—the father by his rational mind and the mother by her religious temperament. During his early years he became familiar with Western philosophy and science, and refused to accept anything without rational proof and pragmatic test. Another part of his mind was drawn to the spiritual ideals of meditation and non-attachment.

Narendranath started his education at home. Later he was admitted to Metropolitan Institution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in 1871 and in 1879 he passed the Entrance Examination. He had varied interests and a wide range of scholarship in philosophy, history, the social sciences, arts, literature, and other subjects. He showed much interest in scriptural texts, Vedas, the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. He was also well versed in classical music, both vocal and instrumental. Since boyhood, he took an active interest in physical exercise, sports, and other organizational activities. Even when he was young, he questioned the validity of superstitious customs and discrimination based on caste and religion.

Narendranath's mother played a very important role in his spiritual development. One of the sayings of his mother Narendra quoted often in his later years was, "Remain pure all your life; guard your own honor and never transgress the honor of others. Be very tranquil, but when necessary, harden your heart." He reportedly was adept in meditation. He reportedly would see a light while falling asleep and he reportedly had a vision of Buddha during his meditation.

College and Brahma Samaj

Narendranath entered the first year Arts class of Presidency College, Calcutta in January 1880 and the next year he shifted to Scottish Church College, Calcutta. During the

course, he studied western logic, western philosophy and history of European nations. In 1881 he passed the Fine Arts examination and in 1884 he passed the Bachelor of Arts.

According to his professors, student Narendranath was a prodigy. Dr. William Hastie, the principal of Scottish Church College, where he studied during 1881-84, wrote, "Narendra is really a genius. I have traveled far and wide but I have never come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German universities, among philosophical students." He was regarded as a *srutidhara*—a man with prodigious memory. After a discussion with Narendranath, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar reportedly said, "I could never have thought that such a young boy had read so much!"

Quest to find God

From his childhood, he showed an inclination towards spirituality, God realization and realizing the highest spiritual truths. He studied different religious and philosophical systems of East and the West; he met different religious leaders. He came under the influence of the Brahma Samaj, an important socio-religious organization of that time. His initial beliefs were shaped by Brahma Samaj, which believed in a formless God, deprecated the worship of idols and devoted itself to socio-religious reforms. He met the leaders of Brahma Samaj—Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen, questioning them about the existence of God, but he could not get convincing answers.

In his quest to find God, he wrote a poem, which is reproduced below:

O'er hill and dale and mountain range,
In temple, church, and mosque,
In Vedas, Bible, Al Koran
I had searched for Thee in vain.

Like a child in the wildest forest lost
I have cried and cried alone,
"Where art Thou gone, my God, my love?
The echo answered, "gone."

And days and nights and years then passed
A fire was in the brain,
I knew not when day changed in night
The heart seemed rent in twain.
I laid me down on Ganges's shore,
Exposed to sun and rain;
With burning tears I laid the dust
And wailed with waters' roar.

I called on all the holy names
Of every clime and creed.
"Show me the way, in mercy, ye

Great ones who have reached the goal."

Years then passed in bitter cry,
Each moment seemed an age,
Till one day midst my cries and groans
Some one seemed calling me.

A gentle soft and soothing voice
That said 'my son' 'my son',
That seemed to thrill in unison
With all the chords of my soul.

I stood on my feet and tried to find
The place the voice came from;
I searched and searched and turned to see
Round me, before, behind,
Again, again it seemed to speak
The voice divine to me.
In rapture all my soul was hushed,
Entranced, enthralled in bliss.

A flash illumined all my soul;
The heart of my heart opened wide.
O joy, O bliss, what do I find!
My love, my love you are here
And you are here, my love, my all!

And I was searching thee -
From all eternity you were there
Enthroned in majesty!
From that day forth, wherever I roam,
I feel Him standing by
O'er hill and dale, high mount and vale,
Far far away and high.

The moon's soft light, the stars so bright,
The glorious orb of day,
He shines in them; His beauty - might -
Reflected lights are they.
The majestic morn, the melting eve,
The boundless billowing sea,
In nature's beauty, songs of birds,
I see through them - it is He.

When dire calamity seizes me,
The heart seems weak and faint,

All nature seems to crush me down,
With laws that ever bend.
Me seems I hear Thee whispering sweet
My love, "I am near", "I am near".
My heart gets strong. With thee, my love,
A thousand deaths no fear.
Thou speakest in the mother's lay
Thou shuts the babies eye,
When innocent children laugh and play,
I see Thee standing by.

When holy friendship shakes the hand,
He stands between them too;
He pours the nectar in mother's kiss
And the baby's sweet "mama".
Thou wert my God with prophets old,
All creeds do come from Thee,
The Vedas, Bible, and Koran bold
Sing Thee in Harmony.

"Thou art," Thou art" the Soul of souls
In the rushing stream of life.
"Om tat sat om." Thou art my God,
My love, I am thine, I am thine.

From a letter written by Vivekananda on September 4, 1893 to Prof. J.H. Wright of Boston who introduced the Swami at the Parliament of Religions

Narendranath is said to have studied the writings of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Baruch Spinoza, Georg W. F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Darwin. Narendra became fascinated with the Evolutionism of Herbert Spencer, and translated Spencer's book on Education into Bengali for Gurudas Chattopadhyaya, his publisher. Narendra also had correspondence with Herbert Spencer for some time. Alongside his study of Western philosophers, he was thoroughly acquainted with Indian Sanskrit scriptures and many Bengali works. But he could not get an answer to his question, 'have you seen God?' Someone told him about Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and pointed him in his direction as the person who would give him the answer to his questions.

His first introduction to Ramakrishna occurred in a literature class, when he heard Principal Hastie lecturing on William Wordsworth's poem *The Excursion* and the poet's nature-mysticism. In the course of explaining the word trance in the poem, Hastie told his students that if they wanted to know the real meaning of it, they should go to Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar. This prompted some of his students, including Narendranath, to visit Ramakrishna.

About Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa

Sri Ramakrishna, who was born in 1836 and passed away in 1886, represents the very core of the spiritual realizations of the seers and sages of India. His whole life was literally an uninterrupted contemplation of God. He reached a depth of God-consciousness that transcends all time and place and has a universal appeal. Seekers of God of all religions feel irresistibly drawn to his life and teachings. Sri Ramakrishna, as a silent force, influences the spiritual thought currents of our time. He is a figure of recent history and his life and teachings have not yet been obscured by loving legends and doubtful myths. Through his God-intoxicated life Sri Ramakrishna proved that the revelation of God takes place at all times and that God-realization is not the monopoly of any particular age, country, or people. In him, deepest spirituality and broadest catholicity stood side by side. The God-man of nineteenth-century India did not found any cult, nor did he show a new path to salvation. His message was his God-consciousness. When God-consciousness falls short, traditions become dogmatic and oppressive and religious teachings lose their transforming power. At a time when the very foundation of religion, faith in God, was crumbling under the relentless blows of materialism and skepticism, Sri Ramakrishna, through his burning spiritual realizations, demonstrated beyond doubt the reality of God and the validity of the time-honored teachings of all the prophets and saviors of the past, and thus restored the falling edifice of religion on a secure foundation. Drawn by the magnetism of Sri Ramakrishna's divine personality, people flocked to him from far and near -- men and women, young and old, philosophers and theologians, philanthropists and humanists, atheists and agnostics, Hindus and Brahmos, Christians and Muslims, seekers of truth of all races, creeds and castes. His small room in the Dakshineswar temple garden on the outskirts of the city of Calcutta became a veritable parliament of religions. Everyone who came to him felt uplifted by his profound God-consciousness, boundless love, and universal outlook. Each seeker saw in him the highest manifestation of his own ideal. By coming near him the impure became pure, the pure became purer, and the sinner was transformed into a saint. The greatest contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world is his message of the harmony of religions. To Sri Ramakrishna all religions are the revelation of God in His diverse aspects to satisfy the manifold demands of human minds. Like different photographs of a building taken from different angles, different religions give us the pictures of one truth from different standpoints. They are not contradictory but complementary. Sri Ramakrishna faithfully practiced the spiritual disciplines of different religions and came to the realization that all of them lead to the same goal. Thus he declared, "As many faiths, so many paths." The paths vary, but the goal remains the same. Harmony of religions is not uniformity; it is unity in diversity. It is not a fusion of religions, but a fellowship of religions based on their common goal -- communion with God. This harmony is to be realized by deepening our individual God-consciousness. In the present-day world, threatened by nuclear war and torn by religious intolerance, Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony gives us hope and shows the way.

Meeting with Ramakrishna Paramahansa



Ramakrishna Paramhansa

"The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! ... everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. ... I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy."

Narendranath's meeting with Ramakrishna Paramahansa in November 1881 proved to be a turning point in his life. About this meeting, Narendranath said, "He

[Ramakrishna] looked just like an ordinary man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language and I thought 'Can this man be a great teacher?'— I crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: 'Do you believe in God, Sir?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'Can you prove it, Sir?' 'Yes.' 'How?' 'Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much more intense sense.' That impressed me at once. [...] I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life."

Even though Narendra did not accept Ramakrishna as his guru initially and revolted against his ideas, he was attracted by his personality and visited him frequently. He initially looked upon Ramakrishna's ecstasies and visions as "mere figments of imagination," "mere hallucinations". As a member of Brahmo Samaj, he revolted against idol worship and polytheism, and Ramakrishna's worship of Kali. He even rejected the Advaitist Vedantism of identity with absolute as blasphemy and madness, and often made fun of the concept.

Though Narendra could not accept Ramakrishna and his visions, he could not neglect him either. It had always been in Narendra's nature to test something thoroughly before he would accept it. He tested Ramakrishna, who never asked Narendra to abandon reason, and faced all of Narendra's arguments and examinations with patience—"Try to see the truth from all angles" was his reply. During the course of five years of his training under Ramakrishna, Narendra was transformed from a restless, puzzled, impatient youth to a mature man who was ready to renounce everything for the sake of God-realization. In time, Narendra accepted Ramakrishna as guru, and when he accepted, his acceptance was whole-hearted and with complete surrendering as disciple.

In 1885 Ramakrishna suffered from throat cancer and he was shifted to Calcutta and later to Kashipur. Vivekananda and his brother disciples took care of Ramakrishna during his final days. His spiritual education under Ramakrishna continued here. At Kashipur, Vivekananda reportedly experienced Nirvikalpa Samadhi. During the last days of

Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and some of the other disciples received the ochre monastic robes from Ramakrishna, which formed the first monastic order of Ramakrishna. Vivekananda was taught that service to men was the most effective worship of God. It is reported that when Vivekananda, doubted Ramakrishna's claim of avatara, Ramakrishna reportedly said, "He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, He himself is now Ramakrishna in this body." During his final days, Ramakrishna asked Vivekananda to take care of other monastic disciples and in turn asked them to look upon Vivekananda as their leader. Ramakrishna's condition worsened gradually and he expired in the early morning hours of August 16, 1886 at the Kashipur garden house. According to his disciples, this was Mahasamadhi.

The First Math at Baranagore

After the death of their master, the monastic disciples, led by Vivekananda, formed a fellowship at a half-ruined house at Baranagar near the river Ganga, with the financial assistance of the householder disciples. This became the first Math, or monastery, of the disciples who constituted the first Ramakrishna Order.

The dilapidated house at Baranagore was chosen because of its low rent and proximity to the Kashipur burning-ghat, where Ramakrishna was cremated. Narendra and other members of the Math often spent their time in meditation, discussing different philosophies and teachings of spiritual teachers including Ramakrishna, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Jesus Christ. Narendra reminisced about the early days in the monastery as follows, "We underwent a lot of religious practice at Baranagore Math. We used to get up at 3:00 am and become absorbed in japam and meditation. What a strong spirit of dispassion we had in those days! We had no thought even as to whether the world existed or not" In the early part of 1887, Narendra and eight other disciples took formal monastic vows. Narendra took the name of Swami Vividishananda.

Parivrâjaka — The Wandering monk

In 1888, Vivekananda left the monastery as a Parivrâjaka—the Hindu religious life of a wandering monk, "without fixed abode, without ties, independent and strangers wherever they go." His sole possessions were a kamandalu (water pot), staff, and his two favorite books—Bhagavad Gita and The Imitation of Christ. Vivekananda travelled the length and breadth of India for five years, visiting important centers of learning, acquainting himself with the diverse religious traditions and different patterns of social life. He developed a sympathy for the suffering and poverty of the masses and resolved to uplift the nation. Living mainly on Bhiksha or alms, Narendranath traveled mostly on foot and railway tickets bought by his admirers whom he met during the travels. During these travels he gained acquaintance and stayed with scholars, Dewans, Rajas and people from all walks of life—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Pariahs (low caste workers), Government officials.



Swami Vivekananda's first photo as a Wandering monk at Jaipur

Northern India

In 1888, he started his journey from Varanasi. At Varanasi, he met pandit and Bengali writer, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Trailanga Swami, a famous saint who lived in a Shiva temple. Here, he also met Babu Pramadas Mitra, the noted Sanskrit scholar, to whom the Swami wrote a number of letters asking his advice on the interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. After Varanasi he visited Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan, Hathras and Rishikesh. At Hathras he met Sharat Chandra Gupta, the station master who later became one of his earliest disciples as Sadananda. Between 1888-1890, he visited Vaidyanath, Allahabad. From Allahabad, he visited Ghazipur where he met Pavhari Baba, a Advaita Vedanta ascetic who spent most of his time spent in meditation. Between 1888-1890, he returned to Baranagore Math few times, because of ill health and to arrange for the financial funds when Balram Bose and Suresh Chandra Mitra, the disciples of Ramakrishna who supported the Math had expired.

The Himalayas

In July 1890, accompanied by his brother monk, Swami Akhandananda, he continued his journey as a wandering monk and returned to the Math only after his visit to the West. He visited Nainital, Almora, Srinagar, Dehra Dun, Rishikesh, Hardwar and the Himalayas. During this travel, he reportedly had a vision of macrocosm and microcosm, which seems to be reflected in the Gyana Yoga lectures he gave later in the West, "The Cosmos—The Macrocosm and The Microcosm". During these travels, he met his brother monks —

Swami Brahmananda, Saradananda, Turiyananda, Akhandananda, Advaitananda. They stayed at Meerut for a few days, where they passed their time in meditation, prayer and study of scriptures. In the end of January 1891, the Swami left his brother monks and journeyed to Delhi alone.

Rajputana

At Delhi, after visiting historical places, he journeyed towards Alwar, in the historic land of Rajputana. Later he journeyed to Jaipur, where he studied Panini's Ashtadhyayi from a Sanskrit scholar. He next journeyed to Ajmer, where he visited the palace of Akbar and the famous Dargah and left for Mount Abu. At Mount Abu, he met the Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri, who became his ardent devotee and supporter. He was invited to Khetri, where he delivered discourses to the Raja. At Khetri, he also became acquainted with Pandit Narayandas, and studied Mahabhashya on Sutras of Panini. After two and half months at Khetri, towards end of October 1891, he proceeded towards Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Western India

Continuing his travels, he visited Ahmedabad, Wadhwan, Limbdi. At Ahmedabad he completed his studies of Mohammedan and Jain culture. At Limbdi, he met Thakore Sahed Jaswant Singh who had himself been to England and America. From the Thakore Saheb, the Swami got the first idea of going to the West to preach Vedanta. He later visited Junagadh, Girnar, Kutch, Porbander, Dwaraka, Palitana, Baroda. At Porbander he stayed three quarters of a year, in spite of his vow as a wandering monk, to perfect his philosophical and Sanskrit studies with learned pandits; he worked with a court pandit who translated the Vedas.

He later traveled to Mahabaleshwar and then to Poona. From Poona he visited Khandwa and Indore around June 1892. At Kathiawar he heard of the Parliament of the World's Religions and was urged by his followers there to attend it. He left Khandwa for Bombay and reached there on July 1892. In a Poona bound train he met Bal Gangadhar Tilak. After staying with Tilak for few days in Poona, the Swami traveled to Belgaum in October 1892. At Belgaum, he was the guest of Prof. G.S. Bhate and Sub-divisional Forest officer, Haripada Mitra. From Belgaum, he visited Panjim and Margao in Goa. He spent three days in the Rachol Seminary, the oldest convent-college of theology of Goa where rare religious literature in manuscripts and printed works in Latin are preserved. He reportedly studied important Christian theological works here. From Margao the Swami went by train to Dharwar, and from there directly to Bangalore, in Mysore State.

Southern India

At Bangalore, the Swami became acquainted with Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, the Dewan of Mysore state, and later he stayed at the palace as guest of the Maharaja of Mysore, Shri Chamarajendra Wadiyar. Regarding Swami's learning, Sir Seshadri reportedly remarked, "a magnetic personality and a divine force which were destined to leave their mark on the

history of his country." The Maharaja provided the Swami a letter of introduction to the Dewan of Cochin and got him a railway ticket.

From Bangalore, he visited Trichur, Kodungalloor, Ernakulam. At Ernakulam, he met Chattampi Swamikal, the guru of Narayana Guru in early December 1892. From Ernakulam, he journeyed to Trivandrum, Nagercoil and reached Kanyakumari on foot during the Christmas Eve of 1892. At Kanyakumari, the Swami reportedly meditated on the "last bit of Indian rock", famously known later as the Vivekananda Rock Memorial for three days. At Kanyakumari, Vivekananda reportedly had the "Vision of one India". He wrote,

"At Kanyakumari, sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock - I hit upon a plan: We are so many sanyasis wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics-it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva used to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion?' We as a nation have lost our individuality and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to raise the masses."

From Kanyakumari he visited Madurai, where he met Raja of Ramnad, Bhaskara Setupati, to whom he had a letter of introduction. The Raja became the Swami's disciple and urged him to go to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. From Madurai, he visited Rameshwaram, Pondicherry and he travelled to Madras and here he met some his most devoted disciples, like Alasinga Perumal, G.G. Narasimhachari, who played important roles in collecting funds for Swami's voyage to America and later in establishing the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras. From Madras he travelled to Hyderabad. With the aid of funds collected by his Madras disciples and Rajas of Mysore, Ramnad, Khetri, Dewans, and other followers Vivekananda left for Chicago on 31 May, 1893 from Bombay assuming the name Vivekananda—the name suggested by the Maharaja of Khetri.



Vivekananda Temple on Vivekananda Rock at Kanyakumari, India

First visit to the West

His journey to America took him through China, Japan, Canada and he arrived at Chicago in July 1893. But to his disappointment he learnt that no one without credentials from a bona fide organization would be accepted as a delegate to the Parliament of Religions. He came in contact with Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University. After inviting him to speak at Harvard and on learning of his not having credential to speak at the Parliament, Wright is quoted as having said, "To ask for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine in the heavens." Wright then addressed a letter to the Chairman in charge of delegates writing, "Here is a man who is more learned than all of our learned professors put together." On the Professor Vivekananda himself writes, "He urged upon me the necessity of going to the Parliament of Religions, which he thought would give an introduction to the nation."

The Parliament of World's Religions

The Parliament of Religions opened on 11 September 1893 at the Art Institute of Chicago. On this day Vivekananda gave his first brief address. He represented India and Hinduism. Though initially nervous, he bowed to Saraswati, the goddess of learning and began his speech with, "Sisters and brothers of America!" To these words he got a standing ovation from a crowd of seven thousand, which lasted for two minutes. When



Swami Vivekananda on the Platform of the Parliament of Religions

silence was restored he began his address. He greeted the youngest of the nations in the name of "the most ancient order of monks in the world, the Vedic order of sannyasins, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance." And he quoted two illustrative passages in this relation, from the Bhagavad Gita— "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!" and

"Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths that in the end lead to Me." Despite being a short speech, it voiced the spirit of the Parliament and its sense of universality.

Dr. Barrows, the president of the Parliament said, "India, the Mother of religions, was represented by Swami Vivekananda, the Orange-monk who exercised the most wonderful influence over his auditors." He attracted widespread attention in the press, which dubbed him as the "Cyclonic monk from India". The New York Critique wrote, "He is an orator by divine right, and his strong, intelligent face in its picturesque setting of yellow and orange was hardly less interesting than those earnest words, and the rich, rhythmical utterance he gave them." The New York Herald wrote, "Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation." The American newspapers reported Swami Vivekananda as "the greatest figure in the parliament of religions" and "the most popular and influential man in the parliament".

He spoke several more times at the Parliament on topics related to Hinduism and Buddhism. The parliament ended on 27 September 1893. All his speeches at the Parliament had one common theme—Universality and stressed religious tolerance.

Lecturing tours in America, England

"I do not come", said Swamiji on one occasion in America, "to convert you to a new belief. I want you to keep your own belief; I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian. I want to teach you to live the truth, to reveal the light within your own soul."

After the Parliament of Religions, held in Sept. 1893 at The Art Institute of Chicago, Vivekananda spent nearly two whole years lecturing in various parts of eastern and central United States, appearing chiefly in Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and New York. By the spring of 1895, he was weary and in poor health, because of his continuous exertion.

After suspending his lecture tour, the Swami started giving free and private classes on Vedanta and Yoga. In June 1895, for two months he conducted private lectures to a dozen of his disciples at the Thousand Island Park. Vivekananda considered this the happiest part of his first visit to America. He later founded the "Vedanta Society of New York".

During his first visit to America, he traveled to England twice—in 1895 and 1896. His lectures were successful there. Here he met Miss Margaret Noble, an Irish lady who later became Sister Nivedita. During his second visit in May 1896 the Swami met Max Müller, a renowned Indologist at Oxford University who wrote Ramakrishna's first biography in the West. From England; he also visited other European countries. In Germany he met Paul Deussen, another famous Indologist.

He also received two academic offers: the chair of Eastern Philosophy at Harvard University and a similar position at Columbia University. He declined both, saying that, as a wandering monk, he could not settle down to work of this kind.

He attracted several sincere followers. Among his other followers were, Josephine MacLeod, Miss Muller, Miss Noble, E.T. Sturdy, Captain and Mrs. Sevier—who played an important role in the founding of Advaita Ashrama and J.J. Goodwin—who became his stenographer and recorded his teachings and lectures. The Hale family became one of his warmest hosts in America. His disciples—Madame Louise, a French woman, became Swami Abhayananda, and Mr. Leon Landsberg, became Swami Kripananda. He initiated several other followers into Brahmacharya.

Swami Vivekananda's ideas were admired by several scholars and famous thinkers—William James, Josiah Royce, C. C. Everett, Dean of the Harvard School of Divinity, Robert G. Ingersoll, Nikola Tesla, Lord Kelvin, and Professor Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz. Other personalities who were attracted by his talks were Harriet Monroe and Ella Wheeler Wilcox—two famous American poets, Professor William James of Harvard University; Dr. Lewis G. Janes, president of Brooklyn Ethical Association; Sara C. Bull wife of Ole Bull, the Norwegian violinist; Sarah Bernhardt, the French actress and Madame Emma Calvé, the French opera singer.

From West, he also set his Indian work in motion. Vivekananda wrote a stream of letters to India, giving advice and sending money to his followers and brother monks. His letters from the West in these days laid down the motive of his campaign for social service. He constantly tried to inspire his close disciples in India to do something big. His letters to them contain some of his strongest words. In one such letter, he wrote to Swami Akhandananda, "Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes of the town of Khetri and teach them religion. Also, let them have oral lessons on geography and such

other subjects. No good will come of sitting idle and having princely dishes, and saying "Ramakrishna, O Lord!"—unless you can do some good to the poor." Eventually in 1895, the periodical called *Brahmavadin* was started in Madras, with the money supplied by Vivekananda, for the purpose of teaching the Vedanta. Subsequently, Vivekananda's translation of first six chapters of *The Imitation of Christ* was published in *Brahmavadin* (1889).

Vivekananda left for India on 16 December 1896 from England with disciples, Capitan and Mrs. Sevier, and J.J.Goodwin. On the way they visited France, Italy, seeing Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and set sail for India from the Port of Naples on December 30, 1896. Later, he was followed to India by Miss Muller and Sister Nivedita. Sister Nivedita devoted the rest of her life to the education of Indian women and the cause of India's independence.

Back in India

Colombo to Almora

Vivekananda arrived in Colombo on January 15, 1897 and received a grand welcome. Here, he gave his first public speech in East, India, the Holy Land. From there on, his journey to Calcutta was a triumphal progress. He traveled from Colombo to Pamban,



Swami Vivekananda at Chennai 1897

Rameshwaram, Ramnad, Madurai, Kumbakonam and Madras delivering lectures. People and Rajas gave him enthusiastic reception. In the procession at Pamban, the Raja of Ramnad personally drew the Swami's carriage. On way to Madras, at several places where the train would not stop, the people squatted on the rails and allowed the train to pass only after hearing the Swami. From Madras, he continued his journey to Calcutta and continued his lectures up to Almora. These lectures have been published as *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. These lectures are

considered to be of nationalistic fervor and spiritual ideology. His speeches had tremendous influence on the Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Bipin Chandra Pal and Balgadhkar Tilak.

Founding of Ramakrishna Math and Mission



Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, a branch of the Ramakrishna Math, founded on March 19, 1899, later published many of Swami Vivekananda's work, now publishes Prabuddha Bharata journal

On 1 May 1897 at Calcutta, Vivekananda founded the "Ramakrishna Math"—the organ for propagating religion and "Ramakrishna Mission"—the organ for social service. This was the beginning of an organized socio-religious movement to help the masses through educational, cultural, medical and relief work. The ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission are based on Karma Yoga. Two monasteries were founded by him, one at Belur, near Calcutta, which became the Headquarters of Ramakrishna Math and Mission and the other at Mayavati on the Himalayas, near Almora called the Advaita Ashrama and later a third monastery was established at Madras. Two journals were started, Prabuddha Bharata in English and Udbhodan in Bengali. The same year, the famine relief work was started by Swami Akhandananda at Murshidabad district.

Vivekananda had inspired Sir Jamshetji Tata to set up a research and educational institution when they had travelled together from Yokohama to Chicago on the Swami's first visit to the West in 1893. About this time the Swami received a letter from Tata, requesting him to head the Research Institute of Science that Tata had set up. But Vivekananda declined the offer saying that it conflicted with his spiritual interests.

He later visited Punjab, in Pakistan with the mission of establishing harmony between the Arya Samaj which stood for reinterpreted Hinduism and the Sanatanists who stood for orthodox Hinduism. At Rawalpindi, he suggested methods for rooting out antagonism between Arya Samajists and Muslims. His visit to Lahore is memorable for his famous speeches and his inspiring association with Tirtha Ram Goswami, then a brilliant professor of Mathematics, who later graced monasticism as Swami Rama Tirtha and preached Vedanta in India and America. He also visited other places, including Delhi and Khetri and returned to Calcutta in January 1896. He spent the next few months consolidating the work of the Math and training the disciples. During this period he composed the famous arati song, Khandana Bhava Bandhana during the event of consecration of Ramakrishna's temple at a devotees' house.

Second visit to the West

He once again left for the West in June 1899, amid his declining health. He was accompanied by Sister Nivedita, Swami Turiyananda. He spent a short time in England, and went on to America. During this visit, he founded the Vedanta societies at San Francisco and New York. He also founded "Shanti Ashrama" (peace retreat) at California, with the aid of a generous 160 acre gift from an American devotee. Later he attended the Congress of Religions, in Paris in 1900. The Paris addresses are memorable for the scholarly penetration evinced by Vivekananda related to worship of Linga and authenticity of the Gita. From Paris he paid short visits to Brittany, Vienna, Constantinople, Athens and Egypt. For the greater part of this period, he was the guest of Jules Bois, the famous thinker. He left Paris in October 24, 1900 and arrived at the Belur Math in December 9, 1900.

Last years

Vivekananda spent few of his days at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati and later at the Belur Math. Henceforth till the end he stayed at Belur Math, guiding the work of Ramakrishna Mission and Math and the work in England and America. Thousands of visitors came to him during these years including The Maharaja of Gwalior and in December 1901, the stalwarts of Indian National Congress including Lokamanya Tilak. In December 1901, he was invited to Japan to participate in the Congress of Religions, however his failing health made it impossible. He undertook pilgrimages to Bodhgaya and Varanasi towards his final days.

His tours, hectic lecturing engagements, private discussions and correspondence had taken their toll on his health. He was suffering from Asthma, diabetes and other physical ailments. Few days prior to his demise, he was seen intently studying the almanac. Three days before his death he pointed out the spot for this cremation—the one at which a temple in his memory stands today. He had remarked to several persons that he would not live to be forty.

On the day of his death, he taught Shukla-Yajur-Veda to some pupils in the morning at Belur Math. He had a walk with Swami Premananda, a brother-disciple, and gave him instructions concerning the future of the Ramakrishna Math. Vivekananda expired at ten minutes past nine on July 4, 1902 while he was meditating. According to his disciples, this was Mahasamadhi. Afterward, his disciples recorded that they had noticed "a little blood" in the Swami's nostrils, about his mouth and in his eyes. The doctors remarked that it was due to the rupture of a blood-vessel in the brain, but they could not find the real cause of the death. According to his disciples, Brahmarandhra—the aperture in the



The Swami Vivekananda temple at Belur Math, on the place where he was cremated

crown of the head must have been pierced when he attained Mahasamadhi. Vivekananda had fulfilled his own prophecy of not living to be forty-years old.

Teachings and philosophy

Vivekananda was a renowned thinker in his own right. One of his most important contributions was to demonstrate how Advaitin thinking is not merely philosophically far-reaching, but how it also has social, even political, consequences. According to Vivekananda, an important lesson he received from Ramakrishna was that "Jiva is Shiva" (each individual is divinity itself). This became his Mantra, and he coined the concept of *daridra narayana seva* - the service of God in and through (poor) human beings. If there truly is the unity of Brahman underlying all phenomena, then on what basis do we regard ourselves as better or worse, or even as better-off or worse-off, than others? - This was the question he posed to himself. Ultimately, he concluded that these distinctions fade into nothingness in the light of the oneness that the devotee experiences in Moksha. What arises then is compassion for those "individuals" who remain unaware of this oneness and a determination to help them.

Swami Vivekananda belonged to that branch of Vedanta that held that no one can be truly free until all of us are. Even the desire for personal salvation has to be given up, and only tireless work for the salvation of others is the true mark of the enlightened person. He founded the Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission on the principle of *Atmano Mokshartham Jagat-hitaya cha* (for one's own salvation and for the welfare of the World).

However, Vivekananda also pleaded for a strict separation between religion and government ("church and state") a value found in Freemasonry which as a Freemason he had been exposed to. Although social customs had been formed in the past with religious sanction, it was not now the business of religion to interfere with matters such as marriage, inheritance and so on. The ideal society would be a mixture of Brahmin knowledge, Kshatriya culture, Vaisya efficiency and the egalitarian Shudra ethos. Domination by any one led to different sorts of lopsided societies. Vivekananda did not feel that religion, nor, any force for that matter, should be used forcefully to bring about an ideal society, since this was something that would evolve naturally by individualistic change when the conditions were right.

Vivekananda made a strict demarcation between the two classes of Hindu scriptures: the *Sruti* and the *Smritis*. The *Sruti*, by which is meant the Vedas, consist of eternally and universally valid spiritual truths. The *Smritis*, on the other hand, are the dos and donts of religions, applicable to society and subject to revision from time to time. Vivekananda felt that existing Hindu *smritis* had to be revised for modern times. But the *Srutis*, of course, are eternal—they may only be re-interpreted.

Vivekananda advised his followers to be holy, unselfish and have *shraddha* (faith). He encouraged the practice of *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy). In one of the conversations with his childhood friend Priya Nath Sinha he attributes his physical and mental strengths, and his eloquence to the practice of *Brahmacharya*.

Vivekananda did not advocate the emerging area of parapsychology, astrology (one instance can be found in his speech Man the Maker of his Destiny, Complete-Works, Volume 8, Notes of Class Talks and Lectures) saying that this form of curiosity doesn't help in spiritual progress but actually hinders it.

Influence of Swami Vivekananda

Several leaders of 20th Century India and philosophers have acknowledged Vivekananda's influence. The first governor general of independent India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, once observed that "Vivekananda saved Hinduism, saved India." According to Subhas Chandra Bose, Vivekananda "is the maker of modern India" and for Mohandas Gandhi, Vivekananda's influence increased his "love for his country a thousandfold." National Youth Day in India is held on his birthday, January 12, to commemorate him. This was a most fitting gesture as much of Swami Vivekananda's writings concerned the Indian youth and how they should strive to uphold their ancient values whilst fully participating in the modern world.

Swami Vivekananda is widely considered to have inspired India's freedom struggle movement. His writings inspired a whole generation of freedom fighters including Aurobindo Ghose and Bagha Jatin. Vivekananda was the brother of the extremist revolutionary, Bhupendranath Dutta.

Aurobindo Ghosh considered Vivekananda as his spiritual mentor.

"Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.
—Sri Aurobindo in Vedic Magazine(1915)

The French Nobel Laureate, Romain Rolland writes, "His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books, at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero!

Vivekananda inspired Jamshedji Tata to set up Indian Institute of Science, one of India's finest Institutions. Abroad, he had some interactions with Max Muller. Nikola Tesla was one of those influenced by the Vedic philosophy teachings of the Swami Vivekananda.

Above all Swami Vivekananda helped restore a sense of pride amongst the Hindus, presenting the ancient teachings of India in its purest form to a Western audience, free from the propaganda spread by British colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, of Hinduism being a caste-ridden, misogynistic idolatrous faith. Indeed his early foray into the West would set the path for subsequent Indian religious teachers to make their own marks on the world, as well herald the entry of Hindus and their religious traditions into the Western world.

Swami Vivekananda's ideas have had a great influence on the Indian youth. In many institutes, students have come together and formed organizations meant for promoting discussion of spiritual ideas and the practice of such high principles. Many of such organizations have adopted the name Vivekananda Study Circle. One such group also exists at IIT Madras and is popularly known as (VSC). Additionally, Swami Vivekananda's ideas and teachings have carried on globally, being practiced in institutions all over the world.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Swami Vivekananda's writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal." At the Belur Math, Gandhi was heard to say that his whole life was an effort to bring into actions the ideas of Vivekananda. Many years after Vivekananda's death, Rabindranath Tagore a Nobel Poet Laureate had said, "If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative."

Vivekananda and science

In his book Raja Yoga, Vivekananda explores traditional views on the supernatural and the belief that the practice of Raja Yoga can confer psychic powers such as 'reading another's thoughts', 'controlling all the forces of nature', become 'almost all-knowing', 'live without breathing', 'control the bodies of others' and levitation. He also explains traditional eastern spiritual concepts like kundalini and spiritual energy centres.

However, Vivekananda takes a skeptical approach and in the same book states: "It is not the sign of a candid and scientific mind to throw overboard anything without proper investigation. Surface scientists, unable to explain the various extraordinary mental phenomena, strive to ignore their very existence."

He further says in the introduction of the book that one should take up the practice and verify these things for oneself, and that there should not be blind belief. "What little I know I will tell you. So far as I can reason it out I will do so, but as to what I do not know I will simply tell you what the books say. It is wrong to believe blindly. You must exercise your own reason and judgment; you must practice, and see whether these things happen or not. Just as you would take up any other science, exactly in the same manner you should take up this science for study."

In his paper, read at the World Parliament of Religions (1893), Vivekananda also hinted about the final goal of Physics, what in these days is attempted by theories like the String Theory.

"Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all other could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfill its services in discovering one energy of which all others are but manifestations..."

All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run. Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.”

Tuesday

Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions

11th to 27th of September 1893.

Chicago.

Background

During the period 1882 to 1886, Swami Vivekananda acquired knowledge of 'Divinity of Soul' at the holy feet of his Guru - Teacher - Sri Ramakrishna. The direct realization of divine nature of all beings illumined his mind forever. This rare experience made him renounce worldly pleasures and duties in favor of monastic life.

In the year 1886, when Sri Ramakrishna left this world, Swami Vivekananda thought over his future plan of action. With his fellow brothers, he started living in a dilapidated house near Calcutta as a monk. There he was engaged in deep contemplation on the teachings and sayings of his Guru, as well as the study of ancient Indian Scriptures. In addition, the influence of British education helped him acquire more information and knowledge about Western philosophies and philosophers. He got himself well acquainted with the concepts of Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and many others.

By 1891 Swami Vivekananda became a sage of high intellect, action, and devotion. He had become a true Yogi. He was well versed in the study of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. He also studied the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed, and Lord Buddha. Thus having acquired direct knowledge of all the religions, having come to the conclusion that all religions speak of the same Truth, Swami Vivekananda had intense desire to spread this wonderful message of Unity of Existence and Unity in Diversity.

Accordingly, he decided to travel all over the Holy Land of India to get first hand information about the state of religion in the Indian masses. The vast land opened up a new challenge before the Swami to explore its religious-spiritual truths. All alone, in January 1891, he embarked upon the journey.

These days of a 'wandering monk' make an important stage in the history of spiritual revival of India as well as the whole world. His experiences during the wandering days added compassion to his broad outlook and sharp intellect. He could understand the sad plight of his fellow countrymen, their exploitation, poverty, suffering and affliction under the mercy of foreign rule and darkness of ignorance.

"To the hungry religion comes in the form of bread," he declared.

And he would have added,

"And for the ignorant religion comes in the form of education".

Material progress and spiritual uplift are not contradictory, are not antagonist to each other; but, rather, to bridge the yawning gap between the two should be the goal of religion.

He was convinced that science and religion should and would join hands so that a new chapter may be written in human history. He saw, learnt, and was convinced that while material progress of India was important for her spiritual revival, to the West religion would come in the form of spiritualilty blended with physical science.

He met with many eminent and noble persons, the Maharaja of Khetri, Dewan of Porbandar and Junagadh, Raja of Ramnad, and other intellectuals in the state of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madras. All these gentlemen were highly impressed by the sincerity, knowledge, spirituality and new Vedantic approach to life of this English speaking Monk.

And then, once during casual discussion, the Dewan of Porbandar said, "Swamiji, I am afraid you cannot do much in this country. Few will appreciate you here. You ought to go to the West where people will understand you and your worth. Surely you can throw a great light upon Western culture by preaching the Sanatana Dharma!" "The poverty ridden illiterate people of our country are not yet ready to receive the message of Vedanta. Why don't you attend the Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago a few months hence? There you represent and elaborate true Hinduism of which your Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, was the living embodiment."

Thus, the Swami began to plan for his visit to America, and on 31st May 1893 he set sails for that far off land; the ochre robed sadhu planning to conquer the scientific reason of West with the Vedantic intuition of the East.

***Swamiji's speech at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago
11th September, 1893***

Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honour of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all

nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "*As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.*"

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "*Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.*" Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

11th September, 1893: 'Response to welcome' address

Swami Vivekananda addressed the august assembly of seven thousand people starting with the words: "Sisters and Brothers of America...", and the whole of audience went into inexplicable rapture with standing ovation and clapping that lasted for more than three minutes.

What Swami Vivekananda spoke came from the inmost depth of his illumined soul, from his conviction and deep spiritual insight. This explains why his common words-'Sisters and Brothers of America'-- created an unprecedented spontaneous spiritual upsurge of emotion in the minds of an audience of seven thousand members and raised them to their feet.

PAPER ON HINDUISM

Read at the Parliament on 19th September, 1893

Three religions now stand in the world which have come down to us from time prehistoric — Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. They have all received tremendous shocks and all of them prove by their survival their internal strength. But while Judaism failed to absorb Christianity and was driven out of its place of birth by its

all-conquering daughter, and a handful of Parsees is all that remains to tell the tale of their grand religion, sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith.

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. They are the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world.

The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women.

The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.

How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect?

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is therefore, Mukti — freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.

And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure.

And what is His nature?

He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thus sang the Rishis of the Vedas. And how to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."

This is the doctrine of love declared in the Vedas, and let us see how it is fully developed and taught by Krishna, whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth.

He taught that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by water; so a man ought to live in the world — his heart to God and his hands to work.

Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to

become divine, to reach God and see God, and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run. Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.

"...Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relation between soul and soul and between individual spirit and Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them."

"...Allow me to call you; brethren, by that sweet name-heirs of immortal bliss-yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth-sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is standing libel on human nature..."

I may tell you that there is no *polytheism* in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images.

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships.

He must not stop anywhere. "*External worship, material worship,*" say the scriptures, "*is the lowest stage; struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realized.*" Mark, the same earnest man who is kneeling before the idol tells you, "*Him the Sun cannot express, nor the moon, nor the stars, the lightning cannot express Him, nor what we speak of as fire; through Him they shine.*" But he does not abuse any one's idol or call its worship sin. He recognizes in it a necessary stage of life.

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

ADDRESS AT THE FINAL SESSION

27th September, 1893

The World's Parliament of Religions has become an accomplished fact, and the merciful Father has helped those who laboured to bring it into existence, and crowned with success their most unselfish labour.

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth; or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."

The Swami's epoch-making representation of Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions was to raise India not only in the estimation of the West but in her estimation as well, and was eventually to bring about a profound change in her national life.

And a few newspaper reports and other comments:

"The Parliament of Religions at Chicago is, we believe, the beginning of the movement that will come into greater prominence by and by for unification of all nations into a common religious bond. That was the impression, at least, of all those whom attended the Parliament of Religions, and listened intelligently to presentation of the different religious creeds. ..."

"Vivekananda's address before the Parliament was broad as the heavens above us; embracing the best in all religions, as the ultimate universal religion -charity to all mankind, good works for the love of God, not for fear of punishment or hope of reward. ..."

"That man a heathen!" said one, as he came out of the great hall, "and we send missionaries to this people! It would be more fitting that they send missionaries to us (America)."

Implications of Swami Vivekananda's Speeches At The Parliament of Religions: Chicago 1893

(Swami Vivekananda attended the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago from 11th September 1893 to 27th September 1893. He represented Hindu Religion and spoke on six occasions: 11th, 15th, 19th, 26th, and 27th September. His speeches require to be studied in more depth, for they are the forerunners of the Universal Religion to come.)

Till 1893 the philosophy of the Upanishads - Vedanta - remained confined to the land of India only. No messenger or prophet had taken it beyond the shores of Indian Subcontinent. In a way, Vedanta found itself restricted in its fuller manifestation due to India's segregation from the outside world. With the advent of Sri Ramakrishna the Vedanta was revived, and this tremendously reinvigorated Vedanta needed wider vistas for its expression to fullest potentiality. Thus, if I may say so, it was an act of Divine Will that Swami Vivekananda reached Chicago in the year 1893. The immanent divinity, as if, also made necessary arrangements for the unobtrusive fulfillment of his mission. We find true spiritual character and virtues in its messenger. The Teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, and the disciple, Swami Vivekananda, enacted the first scene of the drama at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar, which found its culmination in the World Parliament of Religions.

Just five words "Sisters and Brothers of America" and the whole audience of seven thousand people rose to their feet and continued clapping for full three minutes; is this not a wonder? The speaker had never spoken on a public platform; he had not come prepared with any written or pre-planned speech; he was just thirty years of age; still he captured the attention and adoration of a foreign, learned, wealthy, and intelligent audience. Mother Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, put spiritual power in every word he spoke. And no wonder, that power reached the hearts of all, not only to those who were in the hall, but also to the hearts of those who were outside that building. It reached the persons in media and newspaper offices; it reached the learned professors and scholars, and it enlightened the ordinary and the special. The heart of America, as if, was affected by the spiritual fervour of the Swami.

What was so special about Swami Vivekananda's speech and words? The Swami was, first and foremost, a man of the Spirit, who had realized the ultimate Truth at the Holy feet of his Master. This was the most prominent facet of his multisided personality. His

addresses were the manifestations of "Divinity within". Every word first touched the Spirit, and then reached the ears of the listeners. The words were pregnant with truth, Eternal Truth. Those words had no limitations of time and place; those were not his, they represented the Truth of the past, present, and future. It was the perennial message of Vedanta, ever fresh and unchangeable. Those words defined the Truth: the Reality that never changes.

And America was also primed or ready to receive the new message. The usual dualistic teachings of almost every religion, including the Christianity, supplemented by the fact that Science had de facto replaced the religion in the West, had created necessary conditions for finding alternate philosophy or thought that would offer meaning to human life. The material comforts and sense pleasures, the routine based on mechanistic pattern of life, the hollowness and vacuum created in the thinking minds, the visible failure of Freud and Marx, all such and other half-hearted measures were found to be inadequate to quench the eternal thirst of human soul. The impassionate truth propounded by such great thinkers and saints as Whitman and Thoreau, Emerson and others reflected the universal spirit of the Gita and the Upanishad. Americans needed a certificate to substantiate the Truth of their messages and philosophy. Their learning and teaching required a stamp of approval from a knower of those truths. And that is exactly what the Swami did in his speeches and lectures.

On 19th September Swami Vivekananda rose to speak on and about Hinduism, but instead he 'created new Hinduism': Hinduism that for the first time proclaimed its universality outside its land of origin, and demanded its due - its role in establishing harmony of religions, its role as the basis of future universal religion. And why could Hinduism stake its claim? No Indian or Hindu, after coming in contact with the rational and modern thought of science and reason, could have visualized any goodness in his Religion with the prevalence of diabolical caste system and superstitious idol worship. Still, the Swami won the day on the merit contained in the Teachings of Vedanta; it was a victory of Gyana over the restrictive stranglehold of belief, dogma, and narrowness. The Swami freed the religion from the prison house of national and sectarian boundaries; he released it from creedal adherence and fanaticism. He loosened the suffocating stone that was grinding the voice of sanity, reason, and intuition in a persistent narrow grove.

As Swami Vivekananda said on that day in his "Paper on Hinduism": "From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu religion."

And indeed, the same can be said as regards to other religions of the world as well. This acceptance, adaptation, assimilation, or incorporation of the concepts and ideologies of various sects, religions, beliefs, systems, and creed, indeed, was the newness and freshness in the message of Swami Vivekananda. A true Hindu does not abhor idols or symbols, he does not look down upon immensity of numbers of personal Gods and Goddesses, he accepts them as necessary for a few, and on his part, if so spiritually

advanced, accepts higher evolved concept of Impersonal God. He sees the religion and spirituality as a ladder, on the various rungs of which he can ascend or descend. No person is a sinner; everyone makes mistakes, but these get corrected with higher evolution of thought and intellect. So is the case with religion; Religion progresses not from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. In a higher evolved state, it is not prudent to look down upon the previous mistakes or errors with disgust or disdain as "criminal follies".

None other than his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, had instilled in him this wonderful catholicity of heart and mind. At one time we see Sri Ramakrishna examining the almanac for suitable time to start his journey, and at the other we see him throwing off his Brahmin Thread around his chest. At one time we see him engrossed in worship with flowers and rituals, at the other we see him lost in the highest realization of the Formless. At one time we see Sri Ramakrishna unable to take food touched by worldly people, at the other we see him secretly entering the house of a sweeper and cleaning his toilet! These apparent contradictions in the behavior of the Man of God initially perplexed the disciple, but soon he realized the central theme of assimilation and acceptance of all forms of religious thoughts and practices in his life.

As Romain Rolland says of Sri Ramakrishna: "The man whose image I here invoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people... His inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men of Gods." The genius of Swami Vivekananda applied this particular theme to the general, and we see, at the Parliament, the evolution of wonderful concepts like a) Harmony of religions, b) Vedanta as the basis of future universal religion, and c) The necessity to end fanaticism and bigotry in all forms.

Wednesday

Karma-Yoga

(Excerpts from the Complete Works of Vivekananda)

Karma and its Effect on Character

The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit Kri, to do; all action is Karma. Technically, this word also means the effects of actions. In connection with metaphysics, it sometimes means the effects, of which our past actions were the causes. But in Karma-Yoga we have simply to do with the word Karma as meaning work.

The goal of mankind is knowledge. That is the one ideal placed before us by Eastern philosophy. Pleasure is not the goal of man, but knowledge. Pleasure and happiness come to an end. It is a mistake to suppose that pleasure is the goal. The cause of all the miseries we have in the world is that men foolishly think pleasure to be the ideal to strive for. After a time man finds that it is not happiness, but knowledge, towards which he is going, and that both pleasure and pain are great teachers, and that he learns as much from evil as from good.

All knowledge, therefore, secular or spiritual, is in the human mind. In many cases it is not discovered, but remains covered, and when the covering is being slowly taken off, we say, "We are learning," and the advance of knowledge is made by the advance of this process of uncovering. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out. So with all our feelings and action — our tears and our smiles, our joys and our griefs, our weeping and our laughter, our curses and our blessings, our praises and our blames — every one of these we may find, if we calmly study our own selves, to have been brought out from within ourselves by so many blows. The result is what we are. All these blows taken together are called Karma — work, action.

Each is great in its own place

According to the Sânkhya philosophy, nature is composed of three forces called, in Sanskrit, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These as manifested in the physical world are what we may call equilibrium, activity, and inertness. Tamas is typified as darkness or inactivity; Rajas is activity, expressed as attraction or repulsion; and Sattva is the equilibrium of the two. Karma-Yoga has specially to deal with these three factors. By teaching what they are and how to employ them, it helps us to do our work better.

The Secret of Work

We read in the Bhagavad-Gita again and again that we must all work incessantly. All work is by nature composed of good and evil. We cannot do any work which will not do some good somewhere; there cannot be any work which will not cause some harm somewhere. Every work must necessarily be a mixture of good and evil; yet we are commanded to work incessantly. Good and evil will both have their results, will produce their Karma.

This is the one central idea in the Gita: work incessantly, but be not attached to it.

How can this be done? We see that the impression of any action, to which we attach ourselves, remains. I may meet hundreds of persons during the day, and among them meet also one whom I love; and when I retire at night, only that face comes before the mind. My attachment to this particular person caused a deeper impression on my mind than all the other faces. Therefore, be "unattached"; let things work; let brain centres work; work incessantly, but let not a ripple conquer the mind.

This idea of complete self-sacrifice is illustrated in the following story:

After the battle of Kurukshetra the five Pândava brothers performed a great sacrifice and made very large gifts to the poor. All people expressed amazement at the greatness and richness of the sacrifice, and said that such a sacrifice the world had never seen before. But, after the ceremony, there came a little mongoose, half of whose body was golden, and the other half brown; and he began to roll on the floor of the sacrificial hall. He said to those around, "You are all liars; this is no sacrifice." "What!" they exclaimed, "You say this is no sacrifice; do you not know how money and jewels were poured out to the poor and every one became rich and happy? This was the most wonderful sacrifice any man ever performed." But the mongoose said, "There was once a little village, and in it there dwelt a poor Brahmin with his wife, his son, and his son's wife. They were very poor and lived on small gifts made to them for preaching and teaching. There came in that land a three years' famine, and the poor Brahmin suffered more than ever. At last when the family had starved for days, the father brought home one morning a little barley flour, which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and he divided it into four parts, one for each member of the family. They prepared it for their meal, and just as they were about to eat, there was a knock at the door. The father opened it, and there stood a guest. Now in India a guest is a sacred person; he is as a god for the time being, and must be treated as such. So the poor Brahmin said, 'Come in, sir; you are welcome,' He set before the guest his own portion of the food, which the guest quickly ate and said, 'Oh, sir, you have killed me; I have been starving for ten days, and this little bit has but increased my hunger.' Then the wife said to her husband, 'Give him my share,' but the husband said, 'Not so.' The wife however insisted, saying, 'Here is a poor man, and it is our duty as householders to see that he is fed, and it is my duty as a wife to give him my portion, seeing that you have no more to offer him.' Then she gave her share to the guest, which

he ate, and said he was still burning with hunger. So the son said, 'Take my portion also; it is the duty of a son to help his father to fulfill his obligations.' The guest ate that, but remained still unsatisfied; so the son's wife gave him her portion also. That was sufficient, and the guest departed, blessing them. That night those four people died of starvation. A few granules of that flour had fallen on the floor; and when I rolled my body on them, half of it became golden, as you see. Since then I have been traveling all over the world, hoping to find another sacrifice like that, but nowhere have I found one; nowhere else has the other half of my body been turned into gold. That is why I say this is no sacrifice."

What is Duty?

It is necessary in the study of Karma-Yoga to know what duty is. If I have to do something I must first know that it is my duty, and then I can do it.

Duty is seldom sweet. It is only when love greases its wheels that it runs smoothly; it is a continuous friction otherwise. How else could parents do their duties to their children, husbands to their wives, and vice versa? Do we not meet with cases of friction every day in our lives? Duty is sweet only through love, and love shines in freedom alone.

Before considering further how devotion to duty helps us in our spiritual progress, let me place before you in a brief compass another aspect of what we in India mean by Karma. In every religion there are three parts: philosophy, mythology, and ritual. Philosophy of course is the essence of every religion; mythology explains and illustrates it by means of the more or less legendary lives of great men, stories and fables of wonderful things, and so on; ritual gives to that philosophy a still more concrete form, so that every one may grasp it — ritual is in fact concretised philosophy. This ritual is Karma; it is necessary in every religion, because most of us cannot understand abstract spiritual things until we grow much spiritually.

We each help ourselves, not the world

Our duty to others means helping others; doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves. Yet we must do good; the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, "Here, my poor man," but be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.

We have to bear in mind that we are all debtors to the world and the world does not owe us anything. It is a great privilege for all of us to be allowed to do anything for the world. In helping the world we really help ourselves.

The grandest idea in the religion of the Vedanta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths; and these paths I have generalized into four, namely those of work, love, psychology, and knowledge. But you must, at the same time, remember that these divisions are not very marked and quite exclusive of each other. Each blends into the other.

The Ideal of Karma-Yoga

He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else. When a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-Yoga.

The following story illustrates this fact.

Story about Karma Yoga

A saint by the name Kaushik was sitting in the forest under a tree meditating deeply. A bird on the branches above was making noise which is natural for the bird. The sage Kaushik got disturbed from his meditation and with anger he looked at the bird with scorching eyes. The very angry looks burnt the bird and it fell dead on the ground. Kaushik though felt sorry for the bird, on the other hand he was surprised at the power he acquired through his meditation and was proud of himself, that he could burn the bird!

As his meditation got disturbed he found that he was hungry. He walked to a nearby house and stood in front of the house to ask for food. It was the tradition and the responsibility in those days of the society to take care of the needs of a student or a spiritual seeker engaged in meditation. But they were supposed to ask in humility and not in arrogance. When Kaushik stood in front of a house and asked for food the house wife came with all respect and wanted to take care of the saint at the door steps. But at the same time her husband walked in and she invariably had to take care of his immediate needs as a devout wife. She therefore apologized to the saint saying, "Sir, I would like to take care of you. Please give me some time, wait for about ten minutes. Let me take care of my husband and come back to attend to you". Kaushik felt irritated by her words, "how can she neglect me in front of her ordinary husband? Doesn't she know a great yogi like me who accomplished a great power is standing here?" But he controlled himself for the time being and waited. On top of all this she took little more time than he expected.

When she came out she sincerely apologized saying, "I am sorry I made you to wait". But his anger did not subside. She apologized repeatedly. But arrogance will not allow one to act with compassion. When she found he did not change in spite of her repeated requests and also saying that it was not intentional and she could not help the situation, she said, "oh sir, come on give up the angry looks," and she further added, "I am not a bird to fall prey to your anger, like the bird in the forest". He was shocked to hear from

her about the bird being burnt because he never expected that any one would know about an incident that happened between him and the bird in the forest where no other person was present.

Kaushik was stunned by her words. How could she know about the incident with the bird? He concluded that she must have great yogic powers. He felt her power must be greater than the power he has to burn a bird just by the heat rays from his angry looks. The moment he realized that she is extra ordinary at once he fell at her feet and prayed her to pardon his ignorance and requested her to tell what kind of yogic practices she does so that she acquired such great powers. She simply smiled and said, "I don't do any spiritual practices. All that I do is to do my household activity diligently and meticulously". But he did not believe her and thought she was hiding something from him. She in turn replied, "If you want any more information please go to my guru, his name is Dharma vyaadha and he is in the next town. Ask him".

Kaushik then proceeded to the next town in search of the guru she had referred to. Expecting to see a great spiritual teacher, he thought may be he had an ashram or some big place. He looked around in the center of the town. To his surprise he saw no ashram or no sign board of a spiritual master around there. But to his surprise he found a butcher shop with the sign board saying 'Dharmavyaadha meat shop'. He thought it can not be because he was expecting to see a pious man and not a meat selling person. As he was hesitating standing there the person in the shop called him, 'gentle man, aren't you Kaushik? Aren't you the person the lady in the next village suggested for you to meet me? I am the Dharmavyaadha you are looking for.'

Kaushik was totally dumb founded as how could he know what happened between him and the lady in the next town. But he could not do any thing. He remained a mute spectator. He found to his surprise the guru was cutting meat, selling it and collecting money and fighting with the customers for the money!

After he finished the work in the shop he counted all the money and took Kaushik with him to his home. There he took care of his parents joyfully and at the end he asked him, 'yes gentle man, what I can do for you?' Having seen all the work he was doing yet having such great wisdom, Kaushik was totally surprised and asked him 'sir, what is the special sadhna or spiritual practice you do which enables you to be such a great master?

Dharmavyaadha replied humbly, 'all that I do is to do all the duties that I am supposed to do diligently. That is my meditation'.

The moral of the story is that normal everyday work or karma (action), when performed diligently, with true devotion and to the best of one's ability, is as uplifting as the highest spiritual sadhna. It is our attitude that transforms our normal everyday acts to the level of the highest spiritual practice or sadhna.

Shikshavalli

Fifteen Laws of Life by Swami Vivekananda

We are readily able to understand and assimilate the Fifteen Laws of Life enunciated by Swami Vivekananda, a direct disciple of our most recent avatar, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. The 15 laws of living are interrelated. If one law is followed, all laws are being followed simultaneously. It is like a branch, pull a leaf and all leaves of the branch come towards us. Similarly, it is necessary to follow only one law of life that we are most comfortable with and then the rest of the laws of living come to us automatically.

Laws are absolute and unconditional and must be followed for securing peace of mind for success. Peace of mind leads us to knowledge of our essential nature (swarupa), our real Self. When the waves of the mind are undisturbed, when we remain calm in face of good or bad fortune, when we do not fall prey to likes and dislikes, then we are in possession of peace of mind. And this peace of mind comes from following the inviolable laws of living. This ultimate success of Self knowledge is within our reach when we concentrate on following just one law of life conscientiously.

We are fortunate to have taken birth in the human form, to have healthy bodies and discriminating intellects, and to be born in a loving family where the parents have nurtured the students in the ways of dharma.

1. Love Is the Law of Life: All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction. Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying. Therefore, love for love's sake, because it is law of life, just as you breathe to live.

2. It is Your Outlook That Matters: It is our own mental attitude, which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light.

3. Life is Beautiful: First, believe in this world - that there is meaning behind everything. Everything in the world is good, is holy and beautiful. If you see something evil, think that you do not understand it in the right light. Throw the burden on yourself!

4. It is The Way You Feel: Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God.

5. Set Yourself Free: The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him - that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.

6. Don't Play the Blame Game: Condemn none: if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If you cannot, fold your hands, bless your brothers, and let them go their own way.

7. Help Others: If money helps a man to do good to others, it is of some value; but if not, it is simply a mass of evil, and the sooner it is got rid of, the better.

8. **Uphold Your Ideals:** Our duty is to encourage everyone in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the Truth.

9. **Listen to Your Soul:** You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul.

10. **Be Yourself:** The greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. Have faith in yourselves!

11. **Nothing Is Impossible:** Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. If there is sin, this is the only sin - to say that you are weak, or others are weak.

12. **You Have The Power:** All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark.

13. **Learn Everyday:** The goal of mankind is knowledge... now this knowledge is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside: it is all inside. What we say a man 'knows', should, in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils'; what man 'learns' is really what he discovers by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge.

14. **Be Truthful:** Everything can be sacrificed for truth, but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything.

15. **Think Different:** All differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything.

Now a practical problem arises. A long list of advice has been given but you may wonder how you will follow all this and still find time to attend classes. There are too many laws and you suspect that even after making an attempt at memorizing you may not recall all of them in time of need. Most students give up altogether considering this to be too much of an imposition on time where time is in short supply. At this point, many students put the long list on hold until they have time after graduation. The slide begins. The list will be pursued after getting the first job, then after getting married, eventually, it is going to be pursued after retirement. When we put on hold the following of these invaluable laws, we are unfortunately also putting off true success. So here I am going to share an important piece of information, since your success depends on following these laws. *All ideals or virtues are interconnected.* I repeat all the fifteen laws are interconnected. When you follow one law you automatically are following the rest of the 14 laws. So you need to pick one law only that you feel most comfortable with. Let us take a few minutes and scan the list and pick one law of living given by Swami Vivekananda. You can keep this information confidential or share with others. Suppose I pick law no. 1. Love is the law of life. I should pick a law that I am most comfortable with already and then follow it relentlessly. As the Americans would say, make it your mantra. So according to law no.

1, you are going to love all. As opposed to love, selfishness is contraction, it is akin to dying. Now check the shikshavalli and you will find on close examination that it is communicating the same message. It is asking us to love God, our mother, our father, our teachers, our guests, in fact all persons, all birds and animals. This is the same message that is being conveyed, but in a language that we can assimilate easily. Secondly, I ask that you follow only one of these 15 laws. You are not required to memorize and follow all 15. As soon as you follow one law, the other laws follow suite. It is like a branch, when you pull one small part of the branch the whole branch moves in unison. So when you observe only one law of successful living, you automatically are following the other 14 laws. What could be simpler? You can lead a successful life by following one rule of life only. Note that the Swamiji calls it laws of life. Laws are absolute for mankind and do not vary from man to man and do not depend on race, gender, culture, geography and circumstances. All peoples and cultures must follow these if they are to be successful.

We have used the word success many times but what does it mean? What is success? And what is the sign of success? Success is knowing your real Self, your swarupa, your essential nature. We have knowledge of our rupa. The rupa is name and form. When gold is molded into different ornaments like bracelets and necklaces, the gold is called by different names due to different forms, the rupa is due to molding into different forms, while the underlying essence of all ornaments or swarupa is gold. So in essence all ornaments are gold only. Knowledge of our real Self comes from having peace of mind. When the waves of the mind are undisturbed, when we remain calm whether good or bad fortune smiles on us, when we do not fall prey to likes and dislikes then we are in possession of peace of mind. And this peace of mind comes with following the inviolable laws of living. This success is within our reach when we follow just one law of life.

Gyana Yoga

The path of right knowledge or Gyana Yoga means focusing on what is never changing, as opposed to the illusions of Maya, which is ever changing. That includes the Ego or false self-identification. Gyana Yoga continually questions reality by finding "not this, not that".

Knowledge of the right and insight into the proper means of realizing the right in daily existence, are two essential attributes of Gyana yoga. Gyana yoga is not liberation. One knows that the blocks that cloud the mind can be removed, that cosmic consciousness is an attainable goal. Gyana yoga is awareness, not realization.

Gyana Yoga is the understanding of the laws of existence and the awareness of a means to synchronize with them. In Gyana Yoga one ceases to be attached to forms of expression and becomes drawn to the essence, the process of insight. The cause of bondage is maya. The cause of liberation from maya to bliss is Gyana.

So long as the player identifies himself as an individual, independent being, he has karmas. And this is the cause of bondage. Gyana Yoga makes it clear that by reducing the scope and area of karma one can begin to establish oneself in bliss. This is insight into the game itself.

The essence of the Vedanta is that there is but one Being, and that qualitatively, every soul is that Being in full, not a part of that Being. The whole of the sun is reflected in each dew-drop. Appearing in time, space and causality, this Being is man as we know him, but behind all appearance is the one Reality. Unselfishness is the denial of the lower or apparent self. We have to free ourselves of this miserable dream that we are the bodies. We must know the truth, "I am He". We are not drops to fall into the ocean and be lost. Each one is the whole, infinite ocean, and will know it, when released from the fetters of illusion. This knowledge will come to all, but we should strive to attain it now, because until we have it, we cannot really give mankind the best help. The Jivamukta ('the living free' or the one who knows) alone is able to give real love, real charity, real truth, and it is truth alone that makes us free. Desire makes slaves of us. It is an insatiable tyrant and gives its victim no rest; but the Jivamukta has conquered all desire by rising to the knowledge that he is the One and there is nothing left to wish for.

The mind brings before us all the delusions – body, sex, creed, caste, bondage; so we have to tell the truth to the mind incessantly, until it is made to realize it. Our real nature is all bliss, and the pleasure we know is but a reflection, an atom, of that bliss we get from touching our real nature. That is beyond both pleasure and pain. It is the "witness" of the universe, the unchanging reader before whom turn the leaves of the book of life.

Story illustrating Gyana Yoga

Dhruva

King Uttanapada was the son of Manu. He had two wives—the elder was Suniti and the younger was Suruchi. Because of her beauty, the king favored Suruchi. Suruchi had a son named Uttama, and Suniti had a son named Dhruva. Both mothers doted on their children, but because of her extremely jealous and possessive nature, Suruchi would barely even let Uttanapada even see Suniti or Dhruva.

One day Suruchi was sitting and chatting with the king, while Uttama was playing on his lap. Just then, Dhruva walked into the room and seeing Uttama on the king's lap, he too wanted to play there. But the king, fearing the anger of Suruchi, paid him no attention. Suruchi taunted the boy, saying "You may be the eldest son of the king, but to be in his favor, you must be my son. Go and do penance that in your next life you will be born as my son." Saddened and crying Dhruva ran to his mother, sobbing uncontrollably. His mother consoled him and kissed away his tears. When he had calmed down, Suniti told Dhruva "Do not be upset. There is always justice in the eyes of God. Everyone pays for their karmas, good or bad. Think of the great truth she told you: through penance, prayer, and the grace of Narayana, anything is possible."

Dhruva, the tears still glistening in his eyes, looked up at his mother and said "Who is this Narayana and where can I find him?" Suniti told Dhruva, "He is called the Lotus eyed one. He removes miseries and fulfills the desires of those who take refuge in Him. He is not easy to attain. Only after years of severe penance do yogis realize Him."

Dhruva pondered his mothers words. Later that night, when everyone was asleep, Dhruva stole from the palace and wandered deep into the jungle. He walked for many days and nights without food, water, or rest, crying out fervently, "Naryana, Vasudeva, where are You?" He asked the jungle animals if they has seen Naryana, but they only shook their heads in amazement.

One day, Narada muni was sitting in meditation, when he heard the sincere cries of Dhruva. Therefore, he set out to meet the boy. He blessed him, but decided to test him. Narada said to Dhruva, "My son, you are very young—too young to start your search for the Lord. Go back home to your mother where you belong. People see God after many years, many lifetimes of striving and penance! These days are for you to enjoy. Be a kind, generous, and dutiful king. In your old age, when you have performed all your duties, come back and meditate upon the Lord."

But Dhruva respectfully replied "Oh sage. My only desire is to realize God and attain the highest goal in life. Please show me the way." Narada, convinced Dhruva was a sincere seeker, showed him how to meditate, and taught him the mantra Om namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya. Narada told Dhruva to free his heart and see the Lord in everything, everywhere around him. Telling Dhruva to devote himself fully to the Lord, he advised Dhruva to go to the Madhuvanam on the sacred banks of the Yamuna and perform tapas there. So saying, Narada muni departed, leaving Dhruva to his meditation.

Initially, for the first few days, Dhruva was restless; but he soon found an immense joy in meditation and devoted himself fully to rigorous tapas. He undertook terrible fasts, eating only dried leaves and grass, sipping water once in nine days, and breathing only occasionally. By the fifth month he had lost all consciousness of the outer world and had entered deeper into meditation. He stopped moving completely and stood poised on his big toe. His penance was so powerful that the three worlds began to rock and reel from

the force of his toe pressed into the ground. When he stopped breathing during Samadhi, the breath of the three worlds also stopped, nearly suffocating all the living creatures.

Vishnu, pleased, mounted Garuda and went to meet his bhakta. Dhruva, dazzled by the presence of the divine Lord, prostrated before Him. Narayana, pleased by Dhruva, touched him with his Divine Conch. Dhruva, filled with happiness and joy, began singing the praises of the Lord.

Vishnu smiled and told Dhruva that he knew what was in his heart, and he granted him his boon. But he told Dhruva that for now, he should go back to his father and rule the kingdom on earth. In later life, he would ascend to heaven, where he would become a guidance for men. So saying, Vishnu departed.

Dhruva returned home, where he was greeted with much love and affection. Suruchi begged him to forgive her, and Dhruva was led to the palace with great pomp and celebration. Dhruva succeeded his father to the throne and ruled wisely. In later years, he retired to the forest to regain the penance of his youth, and eventually, was taken to Vishnu-Loka, where he became the pole star. To this day, the pole star is called the Dhruv Nakshatra by Hindus, and it has guided men in every age.

Bhakti Yoga

The idea of a Personal God has obtained in almost every religion, except a very few. With the exception of the Buddhist and the Jain, perhaps all the religions of the world have the idea of a Personal God, and with it comes the idea of devotion and worship. This idea of devotion and worship to some higher being who can reflect back the love to man is universal. In various religions this love and devotion is manifested in various degrees, at different stages. The lowest stage is that of ritualism, when abstract ideas are almost impossible, and are dragged down to the lowest plane, and made concrete. Forms come into play, and, along with them, various symbols. Throughout the history of the world, we find that man is trying to grasp the abstract through thought-forms, or symbols. All the external manifestations of religion — bells, music, rituals, books, and images — come under that head. Anything that appeals to the senses, anything that helps man to form a concrete image of the abstract, is taken hold of, and worshipped.

From time to time, there have been reformers in every religion who have stood against all symbols and rituals. But vain has been their opposition, for so long as man will remain as he is, the vast majority will always want something concrete to hold on to, something around which, as it were, to place their ideas, something which will be the centre of all the thought-forms in their minds. The great attempts of the Mohammedans and of the Protestants have been directed to this one end, of doing away with all rituals, and yet we find that even with them, rituals have crept in. They cannot be kept out; after long struggle, the masses simply change one symbol for another. The Mohammedan, who

thinks that every ritual, every form, image, or ceremony, used by a non-Mohammedan is sinful, does not think so when he comes to his own shrine, the Kaaba. Every religious Mohammedan wherever he prays, must imagine that he is standing before the Kaaba. When he makes a pilgrimage there, he must kiss the black stone in the wall of the shrine. All the kisses that have been imprinted on that stone, by millions and millions of pilgrims, will stand up as witnesses for the benefit of the faithful on the last day of judgment. Then, there is the well of Zimzim. Mohammedans believe that whoever draws a little water out of that well will have his sins pardoned, and he will, after the day of resurrection, have a fresh body, and live for ever. In others, we find that the symbology comes in the form of buildings. Protestants hold that churches are more sacred than other places. The church, as it is, stands for a symbol. Or there is the Book. The idea of the Book to them, is much holier than any other symbol.

It is vain to preach against the use of symbols, and why should we preach against them? There is no reason why man should not use symbols. They have them in order to represent the ideas signified behind them. This universe is a symbol, in and through which we are trying to grasp the thing signified, which is beyond and behind. The spirit is the goal, and not matter. Forms, images, bells, candles, books, churches, temples, and all holy symbols are very good, very helpful to the growing plant of spirituality, but thus far and no farther. In the test majority of cases, we find that the plant does not grow. It is very good to be born in a church, but it is very bad to die in a church. It is very good to be born within the limits of certain forms that help the little plant of spirituality, but if a man dies within the bounds of these forms, it shows that he has not grown, that there has been no development of the soul.

If, therefore, any one says that symbols, rituals, and forms are to be kept for ever, he is wrong; but if he says, that these symbols and rituals are a help to the growth of the soul, in its low and undeveloped state, he is right. All of you have been taught to believe in an Omnipresent God. Try to think of it. How few of you can have any idea of what omnipresence means! If you struggle hard, you will get something like the idea of the ocean, or of the sky, or of a vast stretch of green earth, or of a desert. All these are material images, and so long as you cannot conceive of the abstract *as* abstract, of the ideal *as* the ideal, you will have to resort to these forms, these material images. It does not make much difference whether these images are inside or outside the mind. We are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good, because it is in the nature of man.

In the heart of all these ritualisms, there stands one idea prominent above all the rest — the worship of a name. What is this universe but name and form? Can you think without words? Word and thought are inseparable. Try if any one of you can separate them. Whenever you think, you are doing so through word forms. The one brings the other; thought brings the word, and the word brings the thought. Thus the whole universe is, as it were, the external symbol of God, and behind that stands His grand name. As such, names have been exalted and worshipped all over the world — consciously or unconsciously, man found the glory of names.

A disciple went to his master and said to him, "Sir, I want religion." The master looked at the young man, and did not speak, but only smiled. The young man came every day, and insisted that he wanted religion. But the old man knew better than the young man. One day, when it was very hot, he asked the young man to go to the river with him and take a plunge. The young man plunged in, and the old man followed him and held the young man down under the water by force. After the young man had struggled for a while, he let him go and asked him what he wanted most while he was under the water. "A breath of air", the disciple answered. "Do you want God in that way? If you do, you will get Him in a moment," said the master. Until you have that thirst, that desire, you cannot get religion, however you may struggle with your intellect, or your books, or your forms. Until that thirst is awakened in you, you are no better than any atheist; only the atheist is sincere, and you are not."

A great sage used to say, "Suppose there is a thief in a room, and somehow he comes to know that there is a vast mass of gold in the next room, and that there is only a thin partition between the two rooms. What would be the condition of that thief? He would be sleepless, he would not be able to eat or do anything. His whole mind would be on getting that gold. As soon as a man begins to believe there is a God, he becomes mad with longing to get to Him. Others may go their way, but as soon as a man is sure that there is a much higher life than that which he is leading here, as soon as he feels sure that the senses are not all, that this limited, material body is as nothing compared with the immortal, eternal, undying bliss of the Self, he becomes mad until he finds out this bliss for himself. And this madness, this thirst, this mania, is what is called the "awakening" to religion, and when that has come, a man is beginning to be religious

A certain great king went to hunt in a forest, and there he happened to meet a sage. He had a little conversation with him and became so pleased with him that he asked him to accept a present from him. "No," said the sage, "I am perfectly satisfied with my condition; these trees give me enough fruit to eat; these beautiful pure streams supply me with all the water I want; I sleep in these caves. What do I care for your presents, though you be an emperor?" The emperor said, "Just to purify me, to gratify me, come with me into the city and take some presents." At last the sage consented to go with the emperor, and he was taken into the emperor's palace, where there was gold, jewelry, marble, and most wonderful things. Wealth and power were manifest everywhere. The emperor asked the sage to wait a minute, while he repeated his prayer, and he went into a corner and began to pray, "Lord, give me more wealth, more children, more territory." In the meanwhile, the sage got up and began to walk away. The emperor saw him going and went after him. "Stay, Sir, you did not take my present and are going away." The sage turned to him and said, "Beggar, I do not beg of beggars. What can you give? You have been begging yourself all the time." That is not the language of love. What is the difference between love and shopkeeping, if you ask God to give you this, and give you that? The first test of love is that it knows no bargaining. Love is always the giver, and never the taker.

Story of Bhakt Prahlad is also relevant here, as an illustration of Bhakti.

Prahlad loved Lord Vishnu, and his devotion (bhakti) to Him surpassed even his love for his father and his duty towards his father.

Hiranyakashipu was the king of demons, and he had been granted a boon by Brahma, which made it almost impossible for him to be killed. The boon was due to his long penance, after which he had demanded that he not be killed "during day or night; inside the home or outside, not on earth or on sky; neither by a man nor an animal; neither by astra nor by shastra". Consequently, he grew arrogant, and attacked the Heavens and the Earth. He demanded that people stop worshipping gods and start praying to him.

Despite this, Hiranyakashipu's own son, Prahlad, was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Prahlad was immersed in the devotion of Lord Vishnu, which enraged his father. In spite of several threats from Hiranyakashipu, Prahlad continued offering prayers to Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu, who had vowed to destroy anyone who uttered the name of Lord Vishnu, commanded his servants to kill Prahlad. As a consequence, Prahlad was poisoned but the poison turned to nectar in his mouth. He was ordered to be trampled by elephants yet remained unharmed. He was put in a room with hungry, poisonous snakes and survived. All of Hiranyakashipu's attempts to kill his son failed. Finally, he ordered young Prahlad to sit on a pyre on the lap of his sister, Holika, who could not die by fire by virtue of a shawl which would prevent fire affecting the person wearing it. Prahlad readily accepted his father's orders, and prayed to Vishnu to keep him safe. When the fire started, everyone watched in amazement as the shawl flew from Holika, who then was burnt to death, while Prahlad survived unharmed, after the shawl moved to cover him.

Later Lord Vishnu came in the form of a Narasimha (who is half-man and half-lion) and killed Hiranyakashipu at dusk (which was neither day nor night), on the steps of the porch of his house (which was neither inside the house nor outside) by restraining him on his lap (which is neither in the sky nor on the earth) and mauling him with his claws (which are neither astra nor shastra).

Thursday

Swami Vivekananda's Impact on the East and West

Minutes before Swami Vivekananda's death, he muttered words that remain true today. "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body-- to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God." He added, "work unto death, I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you."

Without a doubt, Swami Vivekananda has impacted the lives of many generations. He helped restore a sense of pride amongst Hindus. Swami Vivekananda influenced many of his contemporaries as well as future leaders. Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi often spoke of Swami Vivekananda's influence on them, and on Hinduism in general. In fact, the first governor general of independent India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, once observed that "Vivekananda saved Hinduism, saved India."

Swami Vivekananda is a bridge between the East and the West. He claimed that "Buddha had a message to the East, and I have a message to the West. The West will one day learn to feel proud of this Emissary of modern India and learn from him the philosophy of comprehensive spirituality... When that response comes from the West, the tunnel connecting East and West would be complete, and a new culture, neither eastern nor western, but just human, would be evolved, making for the spiritual growth of man everywhere and tending to develop a 'mankind-awareness' in all nations." He was a man with a message and he delivered it fearlessly and intensely. He spent over nine years in the West and ultimately succeeded in bringing Hinduism to the West. During his second trip to the West, he founded the Vedanta societies at San Francisco and New York as well as "Shanti Ashrama" (peace retreat) in California. Most importantly, his emphasis on service as spirituality has led to the adoption of this practice among many Hindus.

Swami Vivekananda's ideas have had a great influence on the Indian youth. In many institutes, students have come together and formed organizations meant for promoting discussion of spiritual ideas and the practice of such high principles. Many of such organizations have adopted the name Vivekananda Study Circle. This Vishwa Hindu Parishad family camp also commemorates him.

East Meets West:

"East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet", wrote the Anglo-Indian author, Rudyard Kipling. Swami Vivekananda proved him wrong; he was a harmonious blend of east and west. His phenomenal intellect enabled him to absorb the essential thoughts of east and west, internalize them, and articulate a new "Universal science-religion". With a keen clarity he showed that not only the great religions of the world were in harmony with each other, but also the essence of religion was in harmony with

the essence of science. The thought structure within which this unity was demonstrated was the structure of Advaita Vedanta, non-dualistic Vedanta, which is the intellectual basis of the Hindu world-view.

These twin themes, first articulated by Swamiji, namely, harmony of religions, and harmony of science and religion, continued to evolve and bear fruit in the 20th century. Swamiji passed away in 1902, at a young age of 39. Most of his epic work was accomplished in the last ten years of his life, at an enormous cost to his health, which led to his early death. We cannot say that his work is finished, as we see horrific religious conflicts afflicting many corners of the world. Similarly, there are many zealots of science who consider religion as obscurantist superstition, and there are many fundamentalists of religion who consider science to be devil's own creation. Elaboration of the themes propagated by Vivekananda and their wide dissemination in the east and the west is absolutely essential if sanity is to prevail in the world.

We, the members of the Indo-American community, are uniquely situated, and bear a special responsibility, to advance this task started by Swamiji. Like him, we are a blend of east and west. As a community, we are highly educated, accomplished, and prosperous. If we unite, organize, educate ourselves, and proceed, we can accomplish these goals and bring great credit to the Hindus world-wide.

The Young Genius in the Making:

His was a dominating intellect, with tremendous self-confidence almost verging on arrogance. His ability of analysis and articulation, and his passionate style of presentation made him a formidable debater. In many respects, he reminds us of young Shankara, who preceded him by more than a thousand years. He was a born leader of men, fearless, compassionate, and generous to a fault. He was a handsome young man, with great athletic abilities. A great singer with a deep knowledge of music, he was much in demand in parties and gatherings. However, his most important character was his purity of Heart, and his single-minded pursuit of Truth. It was this quality which was recognized at once by the hawk-eyed master, Sri Ramakrishna.

It is hard to overestimate the impact of Vivekananda on India. Almost single handedly he woke up the slumbering giant of India from the sleep of the dark ages. Unlike most religious leaders before him, he wanted all-round regeneration of India: economic and social, as well as ethical and spiritual. It is useless to preach religion to a hungry man, he said. The misery and poverty of the masses moved him to action. The lack of sympathy on the part of the upper castes and classes towards the lower classes infuriated him. He said that the priests have obscured the main message of the scriptures, that of divinity of all human beings. The Upanishads declare that the Lord alone manifests as all beings. He declared this truth wherever he went.

Vivekananda exhorted Hindus to open their hearts and minds, serve the poor, help the oppressed, and acquire modern scientific knowledge along with religious knowledge. "What the world needs now," he said, "are people with the intellect of Shankara and the

heart of Buddha.” He was the embodiment of both these qualities. The institutions founded by Swamiji were pioneers in India in education, medical services, and service of widows and orphans. Since his time, many Hindu religious organizations have also included social service and education among their activities.

The modern phase of Hinduism and of Vedanta philosophy properly begins with Vivekananda. Like Shankara before him, his teachings were based on the bedrock of Vedanta, the teachings of the Upanishads. Like Shankara, who mastered all the shastras of his time, Vivekananda mastered all branches of knowledge of his time. He could harmoniously blend all the knowledge within the enormous structure of Vedanta.

His most important impact was, however, in inspiring the whole nation, especially the youth, to take pride in their own heritage, recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their society, and move them to action. With him there came a great surge of self-confidence in the Hindu nation, after centuries of slavery, self-doubt, obscurantism, and degradation. Some three generations after his passing away, he was the overwhelming single influence in my own childhood, the hero of my youth, and an inspiration that still animates me.

Amongst several great leaders, the Hindu renaissance produced, in the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi, the poet Tagore, Ramana Maharshi, and Aurobindo. It is needless to say that they were all influenced and inspired by Vivekananda. Gandhi affirmed in public that the study of Swami’s books had been a great help to him. Since then there has been among Hindus a growing confidence in Hinduism; Hindus are demonstrating a renewed interest in the study of the Upanishads and the classics. There is now a growing awareness among the Hindus that their ancient religion has much to offer to the modern world that will benefit all.

Impact On the West:

His immediate impact was in introducing to the west the highest thought of India, Vedanta and the science of Yoga. His magnetic personality, mastery of diverse fields, magnificent oratorical skills, purity of character, combined with a compassionate heart attracted attention of people wherever he went. People at the highest levels of society, intellectuals, authors, scientists, artists, as well as religious leaders wanted to meet him. He advocated a partnership of east and west, each learning what was best in the other. In this respect he was very different from many other religious leaders, especially many Islamic teachers. This partnership between east and west is still evolving.

He opened the doors for other teachers from India to come to the west. The list is long and contains among others, Paramahansa Yogananda, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Prabhupada of ISKCON, and Swami Chinmayananda. Yoga and meditation centers in the west continue to increase in number. Ethical and devotional teachings of Vedanta and Hinduism, such as non-violence and vegetarianism continue to spread.

Many of the Vedantic truths he elaborated in the west have infiltrated in to the teachings of mainline Christian churches. However, his impact is not generally acknowledged. For

example at the end of 19th century, most Christian preachers in USA used to routinely condemn their own flocks as sinners, who should repent and be fearful of an avenging God. Vivekananda raised a strong voice against such preaching. “It is a sin to call man a sinner. The Upanishads call man ‘Amratawasya Putraha’, children of Immortality”, he said. Many mainline churches now talk about the Christ within all of us, and the innate divinity of all.

The interface between religion and science is also still an evolving area. Great minds such as J. Krishnamurthy and the scientist David Bohm have collaborated in this task. The Vedanta Center established by Swamiji has branches in many countries of east and west. They are busy spreading the message of harmony among the religions of the world.

On Swami Vivekananda:

“Swami Vivekananda might well be called the father of modern Indian nationalism; He largely created it and also embodied in his own life its highest and noblest elements.” R. G. Pradhan

“In centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main molders of the modern world...., and one of the most significant figures in the whole history of Indian Religion, ..., comparable in importance to Shankara and Ramanuja...He was the first Indian religious teacher to make an impression outside India (in the last thousand years)”, A. L. Basham

“What gave Indian nationalism its dynamism and ultimately enabled it to weld at least the major part of India into one state was the creation of the sense of community among the Hindus to which the credit should to a very large extent go to Swami Vivekananda. Traveling all over India he not only aroused a sense of Hindu feeling, but also taught the doctrine of Universal Vedanta as the background of the new Hindu reformation. The Hindu religious movements before him were local, sectarian, and without any all-India Impact”, K. M. Panikkar.

“Sometime ago Vivekananda said that there was the power of Brahman in every man, that Narayana (i.e., God) wanted to have our service through the poor. This is what I call real gospel...This naturally contained in it protest against untouchability...because that would do away with the humiliation of man... Vivekananda’s gospel marked the awakening of man in his fullness and that is why it inspired our youth to the diverse course of liberation through work and sacrifice”, Rabindranath Tagore

Some points to ponder:

- Now that you have gone through all this information, what message will you carry home with you?
- How has all this information affected or changed you?
- How do you apply Swamiji's lessons to your own life?
- What will you do differently?
- What do you think is Swamiji's legacy, and his place in the world?

Swamiji's Legacy and Relevance for the Modern Age

Swami Vivekananda, for the most part, has enjoyed a remarkable absence in mainstream India. Most adhere to the notion that Vivekananda's "unapologetic Hinduism" can hardly be shoe-horned into the ideals of progressive, "secular" India. Furthermore, it is curious that despite the pomp and circumstance with which India heralds its freedom fighters and patriots, Vivekananda's name, and perhaps more poignant his voice, has been neglected, perhaps even intentionally squashed. That is not to say India has completely denigrated his memory and his legacy—rather, it seems to have fallen to a subservient role, diminishing what otherwise was a fiery and vibrant message, from a powerful, poised, and inspirational man.

Does this mean Vivekananda has no place in modern India? Is his message less relevant to the youth and the masses, merely because his motherland shuns him and lays barren his message? On the contrary, this has made Vivekananda's voice more needed and more powerful than ever. While the "secular powers" that rule India may try and deny his place in our heritage, the youth and the bhakts (devotees) have carried on his rallying cry and kept his voice and spirit alive, despite acute attempts to destroy such efforts.

To fully understand the meaning of his legacy, one needs to understand the era in which he lived. The tail of the 19th century was the height of British imperialism, and the low of Indian morale. In an age where the Hindu was a self-defeating, sycophantic apologetic, Vivekananda stood and said "stand tall." His message, that the Hindu way was the only way India could be saved, the world could be saved, remains as true now as it did then. Today, in a world where materialism and money rule our lives, his message is more pertinent than ever. As our obeisance to the markets and the dollar/rupee tear our country apart, it is only through the love and guidance of Ishwar that we can truly attain bliss and happiness. This is what Swamiji lectured upon his return from the West. This is the message he rang clear. Love God, and through him, you will cleanse the world. Your fellow man will be served, but serve him as you serve God. As Swamiji himself said, Seva, the selfless service of the community, is itself a form of devotion.

In many ways, Vivekananda, himself a master of the Vedas and the ancient texts, presented Sanatana Dharma for the modern world. His message of seva, which has truly resonated with the youth of today, has been his greatest lasting impact on society. This is

never more evident than the fondness with which he recalls the episode where his guru, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, snuck into the house of a “paraiyah” and cleaned and washed it himself, despite being told not to do so. This episode marks not only true selflessness that Vivekananda embodies, but also the view and image that all men are truly divine; once you see past the outer shell, as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda did, the inner truth is the same. As Vivekananda once said, “Man must love others because all those others are Himself.” Just as they were able to see the beauty and truth within every person, so too must we strive to do the same.

Yet concurrently, this episode highlights the tenacity with which we must always strive to do Seva, regardless of stature, varna, or upbringing. This point cannot be emphasized enough. In today’s modern world, where bhakti and spirituality are shunned and even frowned upon, Seva is the gateway through which we can re-open the channel to God. Seva is part and parcel of Hindu life. Without it, one cannot call himself a Hindu. Thus, we should all strive to do social service in our lives, lovingly, as a gift to God and our world.

Equally important, however, is Swamiji’s “unapologetic Hinduism.” The Hindu of today is a coward, as has been the case for hundreds of years. The desire, the need, to please those we see as our superiors, those in the majority, has been so deeply ingrained in us over hundreds and thousands of years of foreign subjugation, that we have completely forgotten and denied our own roots in our quest to appear righteous and “tolerant.” The irony is that the values espoused by Swamiji—those of sanatana dharma itself—are the most accepting of all! Swamiji hearkens us to love our fellow man and treat them as a divine soul. A true Hindu, he argues, can never be intolerant, for a true Hindu has realized that everyone is his equal, his brother, his sister, his mother, his father. Yet Swamiji goes even further and says that it is not tolerance, but acceptance that we must learn. As he famously said in numerous speeches, “Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live?” Thus Swamiji famously blasted the intolerance and violence of all religions, whether it was Islam’s and Christianity’s conversions by the sword, or the Brahmin’s cruelty and brutality to the Shudra. Yet at the same time, he identified with the philosophic ideals of the Brahmin and the Muslim cleric alike.

This message is one that should resonate with the culture of today. Yet it is this message that has become overrun by the rat race and fast paced world. As Vivekananda implored in his lectures upon returning from the West, we must be the fore-bearers of this truth and this message. It is the *true* Hindu way, the way of truth, the way of acceptance, that will lift the world up by its bootstraps, Vivekananda says. So be proud to be Hindu, for it is the most ancient and scientific of all cultures. Never be apologetic for your heritage and never waver in your resolve as an Indian and as a Hindu. This is the greatest way we can carry on the fire of Swami Vivekananda—keep the beacon of Hinduism lit and spread the message of Sanatana Dharma throughout the world, so that one day we can rise up out of the filth and sludge that has surrounded us and fulfill our divine potential. Accept everyone, regardless of caste, creed, or faith, but do not let that acceptance allow others to trample on you and discard your essence.

To this end, numerous centers and places of worship exist that broadcast and nurture Swamiji's message. The Vivekananda Kendra ashram and center in Kanyakumari, where Swamiji famously meditated for two days before embarking on his journey to the west, is perhaps the foremost center for learning. The Ramakrishna Paramhansa mission has centers throughout the world in various cities and serves as a great resource for learning, meditation, yoga, and prayer. And, of course, our camp looks to the message and example of Vivekananda for guidance. But the biggest resource of all is within ourselves, as Swamiji propounded. It is our own resolve, our own willpower that is the greatest tool. We have the strength to accomplish anything. Swamiji has been quoted throughout the years as saying "Arise, awake, stop not till the goal is reached!" This is his greatest legacy, his greatest teaching: wake up, take charge of your life, and realize the potential within you. Only then are you ready to change the world.

Swamiji in your Daily Life

At one level, the message and works of Swami Vivekananda are nothing new—they are not novel—they are merely a rehashing of the ageless wisdom as presented in the Bhagavad Gita. It is the manner in which he presents his message, and the strengths and emphases he places on various things that create the vision, voice, and legacy of Swamiji. The true testament to Swami Vivekananda, however, lies in the fact that this legacy, this vision, and this body of teachings can be readily and easily applied to our daily lives, perhaps more so than from any other saint.

His lessons on bhakti, gyana, and karma yoga, for example, while encapsulating the essence of the Vedic wisdom, all have been updated to a modern perspective and made relevant to not only the modern struggle, but the modern psyche and aura as well. How can we, then, apply Swamiji's lessons to our daily lives?

Remember the 15 laws, and that applying one necessarily implicates the other 14. Strictly adhering to these laws will undoubtedly bring you closer to true realization. This is the ultimate goal, it is true, but easier said than done! That path has countless hurdles and barriers to overcome, and is fraught with temptation and riddled with distraction. How then, can we begin on the path of realization? It is easy to say "practice the laws of Vivekananda," but tangibly enacting that idea is a far grander, far more difficult, and far more intricate proposition. Yet the road is not completely overrun by offal. There is yet room for encouragement and hope.

For instance, when faced with a personal crisis, be it a death of a loved one, an illness, or simply performing poorly on an exam, one can find the answers in the teachings of Swamiji—the teachings of the eternal Dharma. At the most abstract level, resolving this personal crisis can most easily be accomplished by realizing that it is a crisis in the material realm, and therefore will remain with the material body when it has been discarded. This, however, is a very lofty ideal and is also not easily realized. Ultimately, the only true solution is detachment from the problem. This detachment can be realized through different ways, via different approaches.

For instance, when dealing with a bad exam, telling yourself that it is one of many exams to come is one way of looking past the problem and not dwelling on it. Ultimately, the goal reached is the same—you are no longer concerned with your bad exam. The route taken to achieve that goal may not be the one we traditionally associate with “detaching” oneself, but it nonetheless is a way. This illustrates an important idea of Swamiji’s—that regardless of the path, the end truth is the same. We all see the world differently, and we all have different experiences, so why should we all follow one prescribed way to realize truth?

Practicing the three yogas discussed during the week on a daily basis is hard to do, but simple activities like general kindness, praying before eating, not touching books with your feet, all help to define and regulate the practice bhakti, karma, and gyana yoga. Try and see the divine in every creature; the more earnest this venture at the outset, the easier it will become over time, until pretty soon you will see the divinity in everything; and even beyond that, with time, you see nothing but the divine.

Swami Vivekananda’s message was one about how we live our lives. Acceptance, compassion, and above all, the tireless selfless work for others, are the ideals to which we should strive for it is these ideals that will bring us close to the truth. Bhakti, Gyana, and Karma yoga are tools that we can use to help realize that one truth.