

"ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED"



Vivek



"This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive."

"My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life."

– Swami Vivekananda



Vivekananda Human Centre

(An Organisation of Vivekananda Centre for Human Excellence)

www.vivekanandacentre.com

Greetings & Best Wishes for Vivekananda Festival 2019



"You are the creator of your own destiny"

-Swami Vivekananda



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Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna



Swami Vivekananda
(1863-1902)



Swami Brahmananda
(1863-1922)



Swami Yogananda
(1861-1899)



Swami Premananda
(1861-1918)



Swami Niranjanananda
(1862-1904)



Swami Shivananda
(1854-1934)



Swami Saradananda
(1865-1927)



Swami Ramakrishnananda
(1863-1911)



Swami Abhedananda
(1866-1939)



Swami Adbutananda
(-1920)



Swami Turiyananda
(1863-1922)



Swami Advaitananda
(1828-1909)



Swami Trigunatitananda
(1865-1915)



Swami Subodhananda
(1867-1932)



Swami Akhandananda
(1864-1937)



Swami Vijnanananda
(1868-1938)

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Vivekananda Human Centre

"...Where should you go to seek for God? Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, Gods? Why not worship them first?" "...Serve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, and the weak. ... In this world always take the position of the given. Give everything and look for no return. Give love, give help, give service and give any little thing you can..."

"Swami Vivekananda dedicated his life to provide for the under privileged members of human kind in the universe. Whether, ailing or downtrodden humanity, Swamiji gave away his own life to show the right path of a universe of love. The time for humanity to join forces and embrace this universal message is now.

"Come, be a man.....Do you love human beings? Do you love your Country? Then let us try our best to be good and develop ourselves."- Being influenced by the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and with the inspiration of Swami Aksharananda and under the guidance of Swami Dayatmananda, Ram Chandra Saha founded Vivekananda Human centre in London on 11 September 1994. Vivekananda Human Centre is an organisation of Vivekananda Centre for Human Excellence. Vivekananda Human Centre is a registered charity (reg:1170716). This is a philanthropic organisation whose aim is to be good and to do good for all human beings and others, providing inspiration of Swami Vivekananda's message "Each soul is potentially divine."

Objectives of the Vivekananda Human Centre:

- 1.'To serve man as God'- by taking this idea of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in mind, we should mould our own life and character and should expand and promote this idea in the truest sense. To render service to the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, the disabled, the old and all under privileged members of human kind in the universe.**
- 2.To promote Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's philosophy of Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace.**
- 3.To promote consciousness in education and culture among the youth and others as ordained by Ramakrishna - Vivekananda.**
- 4.To promote advancement of public education and peace with those from different walks of life. To promote the study of comparative Religion and philosophy in their widest form and by such and other means to assist in bringing about the harmony of Religions.**
- 5.To establish and maintain universal temple and institutions for the advancement of religion, education and other charitable purposes.**
- 6.To print, publish, sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, any periodicals, books or leaflets or through any other media as may be necessary for the promotion of its objects.**
- 7. The centre must be non-profitable and free from any political involvement.**

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

-Swami Vivekananda





Vivek

Vivekananda Festival 2019
Sunday, 21 July 2019 at 3.00pm
Logan Hall, UCL, University of London

Editorial Board

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Design & Printing Coordinators: Ramen Saha, Sujit Paul, Biraj Roy, Sandhipan Das

Designed by: Sova Infotech Ltd

Printed by: www.colorprinting.co.uk



Published by: Vivekananda Human Centre

Vivekananda House
2a Elmhurst Drive, South Woodford
London E18 1BT, UK
www.vivekanandacentre.com





"I am a voice without a form. 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!"

- Swami Vivekananda

This year marks 25 years of the Vivekananda Human Centre, London. Swami Vivekananda is followed by millions of peace-loving people throughout the world. Outside of India, he was welcomed to London three times between 1895 and 1899. Swamiji's message of universal tolerance and acceptance is very important for the modern diverse society. We have celebrated 125 years of Swamiji's Chicago Addresses last year at the House of Commons and the British Parliament has acknowledged Swamiji's contribution and his important message through an Early Day Motion. Also, the British Prime Minister sent a personal message and acknowledged Swamiji's contribution, noting how important Swamiji's message is for the wider world today.

One day Sri Ramakrishna said to Swamiji, "I know that you are Narayana, born on earth to remove the misery of humanity." Therefore, we can see when Swamiji sat down to meditate on the rock of Kanyakumari, he did not meditate for his own salvation but for human problems and prospects and how to restore dignity and glory to all humanity. As a 'Amritasya Putrah' (child of immortal bliss) achieving overall human excellence, Swamiji says: "Each soul is potentially divine."

Along with other faith communities, we have been working over the last 25 years in London to make it a better place. We are now facing big challenges, including knife crime, hate crime, mental illness, climate change, and many other issues which need to be solved if our society is to be saved, if our world is to survive.

Vivekananda's universal messages can help us to address many of our personal, national and international problems. We need Swamiji's 'life-building, man-making, character-making and nation-building' education. Swamiji says, "You are the creator of your own destiny." "Have faith in yourselves." "To be good and to do good - that is the whole of religion!"

We are very grateful to all our supporters, including sponsors who have placed adverts in this publication, and all those that have made possible our work over the past 25 years. We are also very grateful to all delegates, honourable guests, artists and volunteers who have devoted their time to help us to ensure the success of the Vivekananda Festival 2019, our celebration of 25 Years of the Vivekananda Human Centre, as well as the publication of this VIVEK.

I hope all of you will enjoy reading VIVEK. The success of our publication will depend on all of us in understanding, realising and practising Swamiji's message in our daily lives, in accordance with our own capacities.

"ARISE, AWAKE, AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED"

Joy Swamiji!

Thank you

Ram Chandra Saha



VIVEKANANDA HUMAN CENTRE

(An Organisation of Vivekananda Centre for Human Excellence)

Vivekananda House, 2a Elmhurst Drive, South Woodford, London E18 1BT

Tel: 020 8989 8827, 020 7702 4100

Email: info@vivekanandacentre.com, www.vivekanandacentre.com



*Welcome to the
Vivekananda Festival 2019
&*



Sunday, 21 July 2019 at 3.00pm

at Logan Hall

UCL, University of London

20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

PROGRAMME

21 July 2019 at 3.00 pm



Theme: Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony & Peace

Invocation: Candle Lighting, Vedic Chanting, A brief period Meditation & Universal Prayer

Songs: Malabika Ghosh, Suhita Saha, Prottusha Saha Progga, Sunith Lahiri & Mamata Lahiri,
Champa Saha, Sanjoy Ghosh **Recitations:** Sudipta Das, Sinthia Das & Samar Saha

Tabla: Himanish Goswami

Welcome Address: Ram Chandra Saha

Group Songs:

Participants: Minaxi Patel, Gargi Patel, Faguni Patel, Nishaben Amin, Bindu Parikh, Rohini Thakkar,
Hasumati Doshi, Mradula Patel, Aruna Patel, Janak Amin, Bharti Patel

Directed by: Janak Amin, Bharti Patel & Neelam Patel

Coordinated by: Pravin Amin, National Association of Patidar Samaj, UK

Addresses by Honorable Speakers:

Mr Gary Thompson

Journalist & Writer, London

Mr David Russell

Trustee, Congregation of Jacob Synagogue in Stepney, London

Group Songs:

Participants: Arshia Sumaria, Naavya Parikh, Tanushree Bait, Rutvik Soman, Mehar Jain,
Agastya Nair, Aishawarya Pande, Esha dandekar, Ananya Mohanan, Amisha Sanyal, Peony Poddar,
Eva Kharde, Parth Gayakwad, Revati Kaluskar, Anushree Kaluskar, Anish Aurangabadkar,
Namrata Khanolkar, Arnav Kanthi, Aryan Sheth, Swara Panvelkar, Shreeya Dandekar, Jay Jadhav,
Narayni Shirwadkar, SAI kusare **Directed by:** Ashvini Kane, Director, Swaradhana, South Ruislip

Address by Guest of Honour:

The Revd Preb. Alan Green

Team Rector, St John on Bethnal Green, Church of England &
Chair, Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum

Vivekananda Festival Children's Script 2019

(Reading from Swamiji's Messages)

Coordinated by Sarita Saha

Participants: Srijohn Ghosh, Sienna Saha, Aaron Saha, Shayan Roy, Kunal Saha,
Promit Ghosh Ryan, Ayon Saha, Tapomoy Saha, Dibojit Banik, Shougata Das, Tropa Saha,
Asmita Saha, Nikita Saha Sanga, Suhita Saha

Group Songs:

Sneha Roy, Shubhangi Dam, Priyanka Purkayasta, Sreyoshi Das, Ashmita Saha,
Reshmi Samanta, Swayam Dam, Dibbojit Bonik, Shayan Roy, Ayon Saha, Kushal Purkaystha,
Priyom Purkaystha, Sienna Saha, Aditi Sikder

Directed by: Gouri Choudhury, Head of Suraloy, Music School, London

Address by Guest of Honour:

Revered Swami Sarvasthananda

President, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK

Group Songs:

Rhea Shetty, Anvita Vinod, Aarnav Hastantram, Shreya Srinath, Tulasi Mathely

Directed by: Esha Ramesh, Vedika Academy for Dance and Music, London

Dance: Lakksiya Vadivel, Rhea Shetty, Shreya Jattla, Anvita Vinod, Isha Shah

Directed By - Lena Rai-Shetty, Vedika Academy for Dance and Music, London

Dances: Parul Saha, Shreya Dey & Shreeja Dey

Addresses by Guests of Honour:

Revered Swami Girishananda

Senior Trustee, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission,
Headquarters & Manager, Belur Math, India

Mr Bob Blackman, MP

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus &
Vice –Chair of the Indo-British All-Party Parliamentary Group
House of Commons, London

Mr Virendra Sharma, MP

Chair of the Indo-British All-Party Parliamentary Group
House of Commons, London

Song: Sarita Saha

Address by Chief Guest:

H.E. Mrs Ruchi Ghanashyam

High Commissioner of India, London

Address by Guest of Honour & Key-note Speaker:

Revered Swami Sarvapriyananda

Minister, Vedanta Society, New York, USA

Presentation of Vivekananda Award 2019 to

H.E. Mrs Ruchi Ghanashyam, Mr Virendra Sharma MP, Mr Bob Blackman MP, Gary Thompson,
The Revd Preb. Alan Green, Rezwana Choudhury Bannya, Mani Nandy, Kuldeep Singh Shekhawat,
Leon Silver, Dr Chitta Ranjan Sengupta, Dr Saibal Hazra, Dr Suniti Kumar Basu, Dr Surendra Raja,
Fanindra Dhar, Jitendra Lal Gupta, Maitrayee Bhattacharya, Minakshi Samadder, Sumita Saha,
Bani Basu, Diren Basu, Diren Halder, Sujit Dey, Sunil Ghosh, Gouri Banerjee, Susanta Samanta,
Uday Shankar Das, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, Dr Shipra Das, Mrinal Sarkar

Vote of Thanks:

Mr Vinoo Bhatt

Trustee, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK

Dinner Break: Prasad Distribution at Jeffery Hall 7.00 pm

Musical performance by renowned Artiste

Rezwana Choudhury Bannya

Musicians: Sandyman & Friendz

Address by Guest of Honour:

H.E. Ms Saida Muna Tasneem

Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK, London

The Programme to be conducted by

Uday Shankar Das & Ranjita Sen

Vote of Thanks: Ashis Roy

“Help and not Fight”, “Assimilation and not Destruction”,

“Harmony and Peace and not Dissension”.

– Swami Vivekananda



BUCKINGHAM PALACE



13th June, 2019.

Dear Mr. Saha,

I have been asked to thank you for your message of loyal greetings sent to The Queen on behalf of the Members and Officers of Vivekananda Human Centre on the occasion of this year's Festival for Human Excellence which is being held at University College London Institute of Education on 21st July.

Your thoughtfulness in writing is much appreciated. In return, Her Majesty sends her warm good wishes to all concerned for a most successful celebration.

Yours sincerely
Miranda Hansen Lise

Miranda Hansen Lise
Loyal Greetings Officer

Ram Chandra Saha.



**CLARENCE HOUSE
LONDON SW1A 1BA**

From: Miss Claudia Spens M.V.O.
The Office of TRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall

Private and Confidential

15th May, 2019



Dear Mr. Saha,

The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall have asked me to thank you for your letter of 25th April conveying the good wishes and loyal greetings from your members and officers on the occasion of Vivekananda Festival 2019, 'Festival for Human Excellence', which will be held on 21st July.

It was most kind of you to take the trouble to write as you did. Their Royal Highnesses are grateful to you for bringing the festival to their attention and have asked me to send you and your members and officers their warmest thanks and very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia Spens

Mr. Ram Chandra Saha



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

I am writing to send my best wishes to the Vivekananda Human Centre as you celebrate the historic address given 125 years ago by Swami Vivekananda.

His words, though spoken in 1893, still resonate today and are highly appropriate given that your celebration is during Inter Faith Week. Swami Vivekananda influenced many people through his teachings, while introducing Hinduism and interfaith cooperation to the wider world, not least with his words in Chicago. He was an inspirational figure, dedicated to his work, and to helping the most vulnerable in society.

I am sure everyone attending the event will be inspired by the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. As he said; "The more we come out and do good to others, the more our hearts will be purified, and God will be in them".



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Ram Chandra-saha
Vivekananda Human Centre.
2a Elmhurst Drive
London
E18 1BT

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth
Minister for Faith

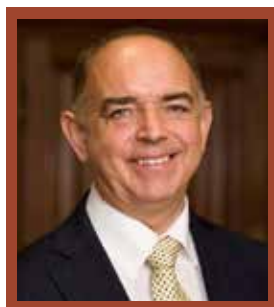
**Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government**
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 3672
Email: lord.bourne@communities.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/mhclg

Our Ref: 4226713

16th May 2019



Dear Ram Chandra Saha

VIVEKANANDA FESTIVAL 2019

Thank you for your letter of 25 April, inviting the Prime Minister to attend the Vivekananda Festival 2019 on Sunday 21 July. Your letter has been forwarded to me in view of my responsibilities as Minister for Faith.

Unfortunately, neither the Prime Minister nor I can attend the 'Festival of Human Excellence' event. However, I have provided a short supporting message for the celebration should that be required:

I am delighted to be sending my best wishes to everyone at the Vivekananda Human Centre for its Vivekananda Festival 2019 taking place on 21 July. I hope everyone who attends the Festival of Human Excellence, to celebrate unity in diversity, tolerance, harmony and peace, as exemplified by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, has a wonderful time.

LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH

High Commissioner



*The High Commission of India
India House, Aldwych
London WC2B 4NA
Tel: 020 7836 2556
Fax: 020 7240 4688
E-mail: hcoffice.london@mea.gov.in*



MESSAGE

I am delighted to learn that the Vivekananda Human Centre is organizing the celebration of the Vivekananda Festival this year as well at University College London.

The values of non-violence, peace and universal tolerance advocated and upheld by Swami Vivekananda throughout his life are of critical relevance in the present day.

I would like to convey my best wishes to the Vivekananda Human Centre for the successful celebration of the Vivekananda Festival 2019.

Ruchanashyam
(Ruchi Ghanashyam)

17 May 2019



MESSAGE

Swami Vivekananda issued a pure message and one which is important in these times: 'I must tell you that we are weak, very weak. Weakness is the cause of at least one-third of our miseries.'

What can we take from this? If we are to be truly happy then we must look beyond material prosperity and develop our spiritual self. Unless we are at one with our true nature, happiness is hard to come by.

In 1893 the Parliament of the World's Religions met in Chicago for the first time with an objective to develop harmony between faiths and religious institutions with a view to creating a peaceful and sustainable world.

Making his introductory speech, Swamiji said: '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.'

Universal tolerance, harmony and peace are at the forefront of this train of thought and the Vivekananda Human Centre works to promote these honourable themes.

London is a vibrant city and one which could benefit from Swamiji's message and teachings.

Bob Blackman, Member of Parliament for Harrow East

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus and Vice-Chair of the Indo-British All-Party Parliamentary Group

PHONES PBX : (033)
2654-1144 2654-5700
2654-1180 2654-5701
2654-5391 2654-5702
2654-9581 2654-5703
2654-9681 2654-8494
FAX : 033-2654-4071
E-MAIL : president@rkmm.org
presidentoffice@rkmm.org



RAMAKRISHNA MATH

P.O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH

WEST BENGAL : 711 202

INDIA



MESSAGE

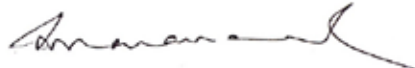
I am glad to learn from the letter of Sri Ram Chandra Saha that Vivekananda Human Centre, London will be celebrating Vivekananda Festival 2019 on 21st July 2019 based on the theme of “Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace”. I am also happy to note that a Souvenir “Vivek” will be published on this occasion.

According to Swami Vivekananda, “Religion is realisation; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.” While emphasizing the need of a fellow-feeling between different religions, he said, “... we find many sects and societies, with almost the same ideas, fighting each other, because one does not want to set forth those ideas in precisely the same way as another. Therefore, religions will have to broaden. Religious ideas will have to become universal, vast, and infinite; and then alone we shall have the fullest play of religion, for the power of religion has only just begun to manifest in the world. It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. To me it seems that they have just begun to grow. The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life. ... But when we come to the real, spiritual, universal concept, then, and then alone religion will become real and living; it will come into our very nature, live in our every movement, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before.” In his final address at the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda proclaimed 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’**”.

May by the grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda the programme and the publication be a grand success!

I convey my good wishes to all.

Belur Math
10th March 2019


(Swami Smaranananda)
President





RAMAKRISHNA MATH, COSSIPORE

90, Cossipore Road, Kolkata – 700 002

(Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev Sarani)

The Cossipore Udyanbati

Website: www.rkmcudyanbati.org

Phone: 2557-3605/ 2532-9348

Email: cossipore@rkmm.org

Date: 16.03.2019



BENEDICTION

It is a matter of great pleasure to learn Vivekananda Human Centre, London is organizing 'Vivekananda Festival – 2019' on 21st July, 2019 at Logan Hall, UCL, University of London on the theme "Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace" and publishing a Souvenir "VIVEK" on the occasion with their 25 years of celebration.

The organizers of the Centre deserve all appreciation for their continued and sincere endeavor for propagation of the message and ideals of Swamiji among all sections of people, from high dignitaries, intellectuals, men of different faiths and common men. No doubt, all these focus to the need of the hour but what, actually needed is to make people conscious of their divinity and the way of its manifestation in the life of Swamiji's messages.

In the words of Swamiji : " My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is : to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life".

I wish and pray to the Holy Trio that Vivekananda Festival 2019 and 25 years celebration of Vivekananda Human Centre, London along with the souvenir "VIVEK" to be published on this occasion be a grand success.

Swami Vagishananda

(Swami Vagishananda)

Vivekananda Human Centre, London
Vivekananda House, 2A, Elmhurst Drive,
South Woodford, London E30 1BT



Phone PBX :

(033) 2654-1144 / 1180

(033) 2654-9581 / 9681

FAX : (033) 2654-4346

Email : rkmhq@belurmth.org

Website : www.belurmth.org



RAMAKRISHNA MATH

(The Headquarters)

P.O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH

WEST BENGAL : 711202

INDIA



MESSAGE

11.3.2019

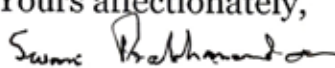
Dear Sri Ram Chandra Saha,

I am delighted to learn from your e-mail dated 8 March 2019 that the *Vivekananda Festival 2019* is going to be held on 21st July 2019 at the Logan Hall, UCL, University of London, and that the theme of the Celebration is "Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace" with several events such as seminars, songs, music, recitation, dance etc. I am also happy to know that eminent people from various sections of the society will be participating and addressing the audience in the seminar. I am also extremely happy that a souvenir *Vivek* will be brought out to commemorate this occasion.

I wish the celebration all success. I also wish that the souvenir *Vivek* be a grand one containing illuminating articles which will go a long way to benefit people desiring to imbibe the lofty ideals placed before humanity by Swami Vivekananda. The message of Swami Vivekananda is eternal and yet modern in its appeal to thinking people all over the world.

May the Holy Trio bless the celebration and the souvenir with success, is my prayer to them.

Sri Ram Chandra Saha
Vivekananda Human Centre, London UK.

Yours affectionately,

(Swami Prabhananda)
Vice President



Sri Ramakrishna Math

31 Ramakrishna Math Road
Mylapore, Chennai-600 004
☎ : 24621110 (4 Lines); Fax: 24934589
email: mail@chennaiamath.org
website: www.chennaiamath.org



Message

I am very glad to learn that Vivekananda Human Centre, London will be celebrating 'Vivekananda festival 2019' & '25 Years of service to the society' on 21st July 2019 and that a Souvenir "Vivek" will be brought out during the occasion.

The theme of the celebration – "Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace" is aptly chosen. Swami Vivekananda called forth the entire humanity to stand united for world peace and fight against the menace of poverty, illiteracy, oppression of women and poor, famine, epidemic, conflicts among races and other humanitarian woes.

Swamiji's message of Universal Brotherhood is relevant for all times. The Parliamentarians, Interfaith leaders and other scholars have acknowledged the importance of His message for the modern world. I am delighted to learn that recently the British Parliament acknowledged Swamiji's call for Universal Brotherhood at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 125 years ago.

Vivekananda Human Centre is working in London with the communities of all the faiths, MPS, Ministers, Mayors, Scholars, Metropolitan Police and Other Authorities for the last 25 years. The Celebration with feature seminar, songs, music, recitation, dance and more and will be attended and addressed by the Monks of the Ramakrishna Order, Mayors, Diplomats, MPs, Scholars, Interfaith Leaders and other Honourable Guests.

On this momentous occasion, I earnestly invoke the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda on all the Members & Well-wishers of the Centre and on all those participating in the Festival.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti,
Friday, 8 March 2019.

Swami Gautamananda

(Swami Gautamananda)

Adhyaksha &

Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur

To,
Sri Ram Chandra Saha
Director
Vivekananda Human Centre
London.



Phone PBX :
(033) 2654-1144 / 1180
(033) 2654-9581 / 9681
FAX : (033) 2654-4346
Email : mail@belurmath.org
Website : www.belurmath.org



RAMAKRISHNA MATH
(The Headquarters)
P.O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH
WEST BENGAL : 711202
INDIA

12.03.2019

Sri Ramachandra Saha
Vivekananda Human Centre
Vivekananda House
2A Elmhurst Dr, south Woodford,
London E18 1BT, UK
Dear Sri Saha,



MESSAGE

I am glad to learn that you plan to bring out the Souvenir "VIVEK" on the occasion of the ensuing Vivekananda Festival on the theme 'Human excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace.'

I pray to the Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy mother Sarda Devi and Swami Vivekananda for the success of this Festival.

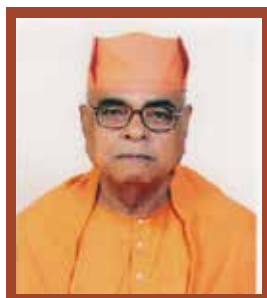
(Swami Suhitananda)
Vice President



রামকৃষ্ণ মঠ
RAMAKRISHNA MATH

২৭ রামকৃষ্ণ মিশন রোড, ঢাকা-১২০০, বাংলাদেশ
ফোন: ৯৫৫-০৭০০, ৯৫৬-৪০৫৫

27 Ramakrishna Mission Road, Dhaka-1203, Bangladesh
Phone: 9553703, 9564055, E-mail: dhaka@rkmm.org; www.dhakarkmm.org



Message

This is a matter of great joy for me to learn that 'The Vivekananda Human Centre' in London is observing the Vivekananda Festival 2019. On this occasion I convey my best wishes to Ram Chandra Saha, Director of the organization and also to other organizers connected with the festival there.

A great emphasis was given by Swami Vivekananda in the selfless service to the human society. This service gives an opportunity of manifesting human excellence within us. We achieve strength in our character by rendering unselfish physical, mental and spiritual service to the human beings irrespective of caste, creed or nationality. Standing on this strength we can face all adversities in our life. Swami Vivekananda says, "Self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, is the law of the highest universe." So selfless service is the highest way of our life which can help us to have all the bliss in excellence, our real nature.

May the Vivekananda Festival 2019 be successful one. My greetings to all present there.
Joy Swamiji!

(Swami Ameyananda)
Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka
Bangladesh.

To
Ram Chandra Saha
Director
Vivekananda Human Centre
London, U.K.



Phone PBX:
(033) 2654-1144 / 1180
FAX: (033) 2654-4346
Email: mail@rkmm.org
Website: belurmth.org



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
(The Headquarters)
P.O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH
WEST BENGAL : 711202
INDIA

6 May 2019



Dear Ram Chandra Saha,

I am glad to know that Vivekananda Human Centre is going to observe Vivekananda Festival on 21 July 2019 with focus on **Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace** and a souvenir "Vivek" will be released on the occasion, as in earlier years.

This is the experience of many disciples and friends of Swami Vivekananda who were fortunate to come in personal contact with him during his lifetime that whenever he spoke to them the very best traits of their personality would come to the surface. This is but natural since Swamiji epitomizes all that is excellent in human consciousness.

I sincerely hope that the festival will effectively spur all the participants into action to achieve human excellence in the light of Swami Vivekananda's ennobling teachings.

I sincerely pray to Swamiji Maharaj for the success of the festival and the souvenir.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Swiricananda

(Swami Suvirananda)
General Secretary

Sri Ram Chandra Saha
Director, Vivekananda Human Centre
London





রামকৃষ্ণ মিশন
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

২৭ রামকৃষ্ণ মিশন রোড, ঢাকা-১২০৩, বাংলাদেশ
ফোন : ৯৫৫-৩৭০৩, ৯৫৬-৪০৫৫

27 Ramakrishna Mission Road, Dhaka-1203, Bangladesh
Phone: 9553703, 9564055, E-mail: dhaka@rkmm.org; www.dhakarkmm.org



My dear Ram,

I received your e-mail dated 8 March 2019, and noted the contents. I duly received your other e-mails also.

I am happy to note that Vivekananda Human Centre will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary in July 2019. I fondly cherish my sweet memories of my participation in the celebrations twice in the past and also of my stay at your house. You and Christie took every care to make my stay pleasant and comfortable at your house. You two kids-Suhita and Suhrida also became so friendly with me. On both the occasions the celebrations witnessed a grand success. I have every hope that this time also the silver Jubilee of the event will surpass all its previous records of glory and success. I noticed with great satisfaction the great impact you and your organization have been able to leave upon the general devotees and the elites of London and other neighboring areas. It was a very commendable job indeed! Our warmest congratulations to you.

Swami Vivekananda has been acclaimed as a prophet of the age. But, he is a prophet with a difference. Generally, prophets are associated with a sect, a community, a creed, a country, and an age. But all these features cannot be attributed to Swami Vivekananda, the prophet. He cannot be connected with any particular creed or sect or community or country, or age. He is indeed a prophet without frontiers. He is a prophet of humanity at large. He is by all means a universal prophet.

His message delivered at the parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, contained a message Relevant for all times, all countries, and all nations. He spoke of the principle of positive Tolerance and positive acceptance, and of a glorious future of mankind in all ages and times. It was he for the first time in modern time spoke the necessity of a universal religion. He used to say: We want to lead mankind to a goal which cannot be termed Hinduistic or Buddhistic or Christian or Mohammedan or anything else. It will not be based neither upon the Vedas nor the Bible nor the Quran, nor any other sacred Book. It will rather be developed harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible, and the Quran and the sacred Books. The goal is to take mankind to a Point, to a place which may be termed as ONENESS or RELIGION or UNITY.

Unity is the ideal and human excellence is the end product which may be called 'Religion'. The

More we take care of the ideal, the surer we reach our goal.

This message was indeed a new message, a new gospel, which is needed much more relevant Now in the world filled with the attitude of intolerance, hatred, jealousy, suspicion, and doubts. Swamiji said that he preached only the message of Vedanta and nothing but Vedanta. Vedanta Preaches the inherent divinity of man, the immense potentialities of man. Our duty is to manifest the divinity within, to bring out the human excellence that we carry with us since we are born. Swamiji says: "teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity." Man making was Swamiji's mission. If man really becomes man, all the problems that face now and will be facing in future, will be solved once for all. Your esteemed institution, Vivekananda Human Centre, is devoted to implement Swamiji's great mission.

Swamiji's message was relevant in his time. But it is much more relevant in the present context and it will remain so as long as the human civilization exists.

I wish from the bottom of my heart a grand and splendid success of your celebration. With all love and best wishes to you and all your colleagues there.

Yours affectionately

Swami Purnatmananda

Swami Purnatmananda
Secretary





KENSINGTON PALACE

From: Miss Claudia Spens M.V.O.
The Office of TRH The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge

Private and Confidential

6th June, 2019

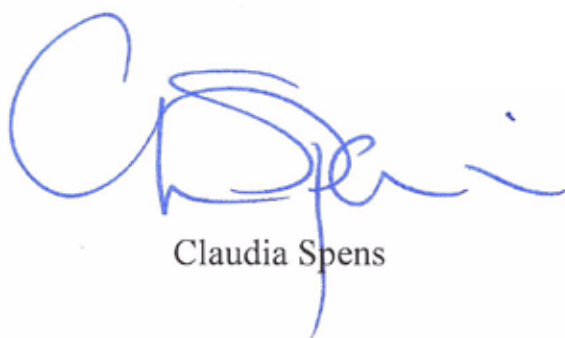


Dear Mr. Saha,

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have asked me to thank you for your letter of 25th April conveying the good wishes and loyal greetings from your members and officers on the occasion of Vivekananda Festival 2019, 'Festival for Human Excellence', which will be held next month.

It was most kind of you to take the trouble to write as you did. Their Royal Highnesses are grateful to you for bringing this event to their attention and they have asked me to send you, your members and officers, their warmest thanks and very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



Claudia Spens

Mr. Ram Chandra Saha

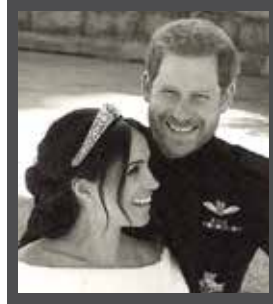


KENSINGTON PALACE

From: Miss Claudia Spens M.V.O.
The Office of TRH The Duke and Duchess of Sussex

Private and Confidential

24th June, 2019



Dear Mr. Saha,

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have asked me to thank you for your letter of 29th April in connection with the Vivekananda Festival 2019 on 21st July.

Your reasons for writing as you did are appreciated and Their Royal Highnesses are grateful to you for taking the trouble to bring this event to their attention. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have asked me to send you their best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia Spens

Mr. Ram Chandra Saha

VIRENDRA SHARMA
Member of Parliament for Ealing Southall



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA



Ram Chandra Saha
Director
Vivekananda Human Centre
Vivekananda House
2A Elmhurst Drive
E18 1BT

14th March 2019

Dear Ram Chandra Saha

RE: Vivekananda Festival 2019 "Human Excellence, Unity in Diversity, Universal Tolerance, Harmony and Peace"

I want to offer my support and best wishes for your important festival and key message for the modern world of tolerance and to work for the betterment of society.

Today the message of helping the most vulnerable and worst off in society stands as an example for all. You are a shining light in a world too short of compassion.

We can learn from Swami Vivekananda and his understanding of science and morality. When Swami Vivekananda tells us that even before we knew of gravity it existed, and even after we forget it, it will still exist, he reminds us that times and knowledge will change. We should not cling to the old fashioned and outdated, but we must always remember to try to improve ourselves and our humanity.

Best wishes

Virendra Sharma MP
Chair, Indo-British All Party Parliamentary Group

Westminster Office
Telephone: 020 7219 6080

Constituency Office
112 A, The Green
Southall, Middlesex, UB2 4BQ
Tel: 020 8571 1003

Virendra Sharma can be e-mailed at: sharmav@parliament.uk
www.virendrasharma.com





The Transformation from Narendranath to Vivekananda

Swami Chetanananda

President, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA

May the Lord of the universe, the remover of evil, whom the devotees of Shiva worship as Shiva, the Vedantists as Brahman, the Buddhists as Buddha [and we may add, the Christians as the Father in heaven, the Jews as Jehovah, the Muslims as Allah], the followers of Nyaya (logic) as the Divine Agent, the Jains as Arhat, the followers of Mimamsa (ritualists) as Karma -- grant us peace, bliss and harmony.

On behalf of the Ramakrishna Order, I heartily welcome the distinguished representatives of different religions who have come to BelurMath today to represent their respective faiths, on this auspicious occasion of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary. Perhaps you have noticed that each speaker is scheduled to speak for 20 minutes. Some years ago an Episcopalian minister in America gave me this piece of advice: 'Swami, no soul can be saved after 20 minutes.' What he meant was that whatever you have to say, say it within 20 minutes.

The main focus of this international seminar is the Harmony of Religions. Swami Vivekananda was truly a harbinger of this harmony. His life was short -- 39 years, 5 months, and 24 days -- but his message is long lasting. He himself prophesied that his message would continue for 1,500 years.

The Origin of Vivekananda's Concept of Harmony

Vivekananda's concept of harmony is rooted in four sources: the scriptures, his guru, his motherland, and his own realization.

1. The Scriptures Vivekananda found the seeds of the harmony of religions in various Hindu scriptures, such as

'Truth is one, sages call It by various names.' (Rig Veda)

'Whosoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him. All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.' (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 people take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.' (Sivamahimnah Stotram)

'Each human body is a temple of God, and each soul is nothing but God.' (Upanishad)

It is to be noted that thousands of years ago, when these messages of harmony were given, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam did not exist.

2. His Guru

Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda's guru, was the prophet of harmony in this age. Every one of his actions and all his teachings demonstrated the principle of harmony. For example, Ramakrishna harmonized the life of a true sannyasin with the life of a true householder. He was unique in the religious history



of the world as he realized God through Hindu practices, then practised Christianity and Islam and experienced the goal of those faiths also. In so doing, he demonstrated the harmony of religions. Finally, he declared the message of harmony for this present age when he said: yata mat tata path -- as many faiths, so many paths.

Vivekananda stated in his lecture 'My Master': 'I learnt from my Master that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions; there is only one. One Infinite Religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this Religion is expressing itself in various countries, in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can.... For years I lived with that man, but never did I hear those lips utter one word of condemnation for any sect. He had the same sympathy for all sects; he had found the harmony between them.'

3. His Motherland

During his itinerant days, Vivekananda travelled all over India, and he made some observations about people of the Hindu faith. He saw that although Hindus are diverse -- their languages, social customs, religious practices, dress, food habits, and skin colour are all different -- they are all Hindus. He also discovered the common bases of Hinduism: (a) all Hindus believe in the authority of the Vedas; (b) the concept of God may differ among the Hindus, but all believe in God; (c) all believe creation moves in a wavelike motion through eternity; (d) all believe in the immortal nature of the Atman, which is pure and perfect, beyond the body and the mind; and (e) all believe in the doctrine of karma and reincarnation.

Once, in Madras, Vivekananda said that the three main schools of Vedanta -- dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism -- are not contradictory but complementary. In the end, all souls merge into that One without a second. When someone remarked that nobody had ever said that before, Vivekananda replied, 'I was born for this, and it was left for me to do.'

4. Vivekananda's Realization

One day at Dakshineswar Vivekananda mocked the Vedantic experience of oneness. He said to Ramakrishna: 'How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God, and we too are God! Nothing can be more preposterous!' At that moment Sri Ramakrishna touched him.

Vivekananda later said: 'The magic touch of the Master that day brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that there was really nothing in the universe but God!' Later, in Cossipore, he attained nirvikalpa samadhi, the culmination of the Vedantic experience. During his itinerant days in the Himalayas, he realized that the microcosm (the internal world) and the macrocosm (the external world) are built on the same plan. The experiences of both these worlds should be in perfect harmony with Truth.

The Importance of the Parliament of Religions

The Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, was an epochmaking, historical event in the religious history of the world. The American people brought religious leaders from all the various religions together on the same platform. This had never happened before. Although Swami Vivekananda represented Hinduism and Vedanta, he created through his talks a beautiful harmony among all the religions. This Parliament was held as part of the Columbian Exposition, in which the American people wanted to demonstrate the achievements of science and technology. It was held in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America.

The magnitude of that Parliament of Religions is noteworthy: It continued for seventeen days, with three sessions each, and each session averaged more than two and a half hours. There were 115 speakers from all over the world. Swamiji was so popular that he spoke six times at the Parliament.



The Congress of Religions took place in a hall that combined Columbus Hall and Washington Hall, and which had a combined capacity of 7,000 people.

In spite of opposition from the leaders of various Christian denominations, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, the advisory committee adopted ten objectives for the Parliament of Religions. Some of these were: 1. To bring together in conference, for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great Historic Religions of the world. 2. To show to people, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various Religions hold and teach in common. 3. To inquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other Religions of the world. 4. To discover, from competent people, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age. 5. To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.

During the Parliament most of the other representatives were trying to glorify his or her own faith. However, Swamiji's concluding remark of his first speech created a wonderful atmosphere of harmony. He said: 'I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention 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.'

I sincerely believe that these objectives are as pertinent today as they were 120 years ago. When we open our newspapers in the morning, we see that there is so much unrest and violence all over the world -- often in the name of religion. I offer my humble appreciation to the organizers of this present parliament that has given us a chance to imbibe the spirit of mutual love and understanding, peace and harmony, which are badly needed in this present strife-stricken world.

Nowadays, in the main cities all over the United States and Canada and other parts of the world, you will find inter-religious councils or interfaith partnerships. This concept began after the advent of Ramakrishna and after the Parliament of Religions in 1893. Swamiji said that within seven years of Sri Ramakrishna's passing in 1886, his universal message encircled the globe.

One of our friends who has done much to build a bridge between the religious and philosophical thoughts of the East and the West is Huston Smith, who was a former president of our St. Louis Vedanta Society. We are sorry he cannot be with us today. Huston Smith once told me: 'Swami, while I was writing the chapter on Hinduism in what was to become my book, *The World's Religions*, I read and meditated on ten pages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* each day, and I credit those meditations for the acclaim that has greeted that chapter.'

Another friend who has also done wonderful work in this regard is Father Francis Clooney of Harvard University. He is here today and is our keynote speaker in this parliament. These two people -- Huston Smith and Father Clooney -- have done tremendous work in the United States, trying to bring Eastern thought to the West, and Western thought to the East.

On 30 December 1894 Swamiji said: 'I have a message to the West, as Buddha had a message to the East.' What was that message? That message was Vedanta. Many years later, a Jewish intellectual who had heard Vivekananda speak at the Parliament told Swami Nikhilananda, 'After hearing Swami Vivekananda, I realized that my religion was also true.' In the 1960s, Eastern religions came in waves to America, but Swamiji was the first Hindu monk to carry the message of the East to the West. Professor C.T. Jackson wrote: 'Looking back a century later, Vivekananda clearly deserves credit as the founder of American Hinduism and the pioneer teacher who paved the way for all Eastern teachers who have followed since the 1960s.'

Swamiji was a universal person and his message was universal, but he also presented his message for the East, which we find in his lectures from Colombo to Almora. In those talks he tried to awaken the self-esteem, selfconfidence, and the national consciousness of India. In the West, he gave his beautiful message through his four yogas -- karma, bhakti, jnana, and raja. He reminded Westerners that they are not sinners. On 19 September 1893, Swamiji read a paper on Hinduism, in which he said: 'Ye divinities on earth -- sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.'

Vivekananda in the West

Shortly after Ramakrishna passed away, when his monastic disciples were living almost in poverty at the Baranagore monastery, Swamiji one day told his brother disciples, 'You will see that our names will be recorded in history.' Now it is a fact and his words came true.

In 1964 Carl Thomas Jackson received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles; his thesis was titled *The Swami in America: A History of the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States, 1893-1960*. In 1988 Eleanor Stark got her Master's degree in American History and wrote a book on Swamiji, *The Gift Unopened: A New American Revolution*.

In 1976, during the United States Bicentennial Celebration, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., had an exhibit called 'Abroad in America'. There were pavilions dedicated to 26 foreigners who came to the United States and made a substantial contribution to American heritage. Swami Vivekananda was the only one from India. I saw that exhibition. It was undoubtedly a great recognition of Swamiji's contribution to the West.

Swami Vivekananda redefined religion for the Western people. He said that religion is realization. Religion is being and becoming. Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in human beings. The old religions said that one was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says one is an atheist who does not believe in oneself. In this way, Swamiji brought about a revolution in the field of religion.

The United States is a new nation. The American people are lovers of new ideas; they want to know something new. They found something new in Swamiji. The United States is a grand field for Vedanta. Why? Because two things are in the blood of the American people: love of freedom and love of democracy. The presiding deity of the United States is the Statue of Liberty, which you will find in the New York harbour. Vedanta says freedom is the song of the soul. Throughout almost all of the Vedantic literature, you will find at the end, *jivanmukti* -- freedom while living. Regarding democracy, the Vedantic concept of God is a democratic concept of God. One of our Upanishads says: *Deho devalaya proktah sa jiva kevala shiva* -- Each human body is the temple of God and each being is truly God. Each soul is potentially divine.

Interreligious Relations

How can we remove fighting, misunderstanding, mistrust, and ill feeling from organized religions? Religion is not at fault. Politicians and fanatics use religion for ulterior motives. We find the same wonderful golden rule in all religions, but very few observe that rule. Buddhism says: 'Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.' Christianity says: 'Do for others what you want them to do for you.' Islam says: 'No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brothers that which he desires for himself.' Hinduism says: 'Whatever you consider injurious to yourself, never do to others. This is the essence of dharma.'

The problem is that we talk about religion and talk about God, but we do not practise religion. The Vishnu Purana says: 'Those who talk about God, but do not do their duties and practise religion, they are enemies of God. This is because God has to incarnate to demonstrate religion to these hypocrites.'

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan quoted the biting words of Swift in his book *The Hindu View of Life*: 'We have enough religion to hate one another; but we have not enough religion to love one another.' Our common enemies are not religions: our enemies are atheism, agnosticism, materialism, scepticism, secularism, hedonism, and finally, apathy. Apathy and indifference towards religion are rampant today. People care more for money, enjoyment, and their bodies than they do for religion or God. This is a peculiarity of this modern age that those of us working in the field of organized religions see.

A good relationship among the various religions is vital, because if we do not learn to live together, we shall die together fighting among ourselves. Swami Nikhilananda said: 'Religions as human institutions cannot be absolutely perfect, but God is perfect. Religion is not God, but shows the way to God. As

clocks should be corrected from time to time by the sun, so also religions. The corrections are made by the mystic saints who directly commune with God, and not by the theologians, who are only the interpreters of the scriptures.'

Vivekananda visualized the religion of the future, where science and religion will meet and shake hands, poetry and philosophy will become friends, reason and faith will embrace each other, and the heart and the intellect will forget their conflicts forever.

The Religion of the Twenty-First Century

The main focus of religion in the nineteenth century was reason, and in the twentieth century it was humanism. If religion cannot do any good to human beings, what good is that religion? If anybody asks me: What type of religion will play a vital role in the twenty-first century? My answer will be 'mysticism'. Mystics commune with God through love and contemplation. They are in every religious tradition and they are a class by themselves.

In October 1992 there was a conference on Great Contemporary Mystics held in Avila, Spain. I was invited to speak on Sri Ramakrishna. I quoted that famous saying of Ramakrishna: 'All jackals in the world howl in the same way.' In other words, the mystics of different religions may speak different languages but their experience of Oneness is always the same. A medieval Indian mystic wrote: 'There may be different kinds of oil in different lamps, the wicks also may be of different kinds, but when they burn, we have the same flame and illumination.'

Nowadays some people say, 'We have read enough, we have heard many sermons, but now we want experience.' This is the popular sentiment in the West. We live in an age when creeds are shaken, dogmas are questioned, and traditions are dissolving. Don Cupif, a famous English scholar, wrote in his book *The Sea of Faith*: 'In this 21st century, religion will not be held by the doctrines and dogmas.' People are seeking direct experience. When one experiences God, one sees unity in diversity -- God in every being and everything. One of the Upanishads says: 'When one experiences the Atman, one cannot hate anyone.' Once Rabia, a Sufi mystic, was asked, 'Do you love God?' 'Yes,' she replied. 'Do you hate Satan?' 'No.' 'Why?' 'Because God did not keep any room for hatred in my heart.'

For this present age, Swami Vivekananda taught a religion that is constructive and not destructive, scientific and not fanatical, practical and not theoretical, rational and not superstitious, universal and not parochial. We see this in Swami Vivekananda's concluding remarks at the Parliament of Religions: 'Help and not fight,' 'Assimilation and not destruction,' 'Harmony and peace and not dissension.'

How can we help each other? During natural catastrophes we always come together, forgoing our caste or creed or religion. India has made a wonderful contribution to this world: It has given shelter to all religions. India is called Bharata: Bha means light, rata means immersed, the country that is immersed in the light or consciousness of God. Moreover, it is the birthplace of four of the religions of the world: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

India also gave shelter to the Zoroastrians, who settled in the western part of India. When the Jewish people were persecuted, some came and settled in India. One of the oldest synagogues in the world is found in Cochin. Then came Christianity: the oldest Christian community in the world was established in India by the Apostle Thomas about 25 years after the death of Jesus. Regarding Islam, I believe it was during the tenth century that Muslims began to settle in India. Now India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, next to Indonesia.

How do we assimilate the spirit of other religions? Swami Vivekananda said during the concluding session of the Parliament: '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.... Each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.'

In this connection, I remember that someone once asked Huston Smith: 'You are a Methodist minister. Why do you meet with Muslims, Hindus, and people of other faiths?' He replied: 'You know, I take my own food, but other religions I take as a food supplement, like a vitamin. It does not disturb my system at all. It energizes me; it gives me more strength.'

How can we create a harmony of religions? As we mentioned earlier, Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated that harmony in this age. He did not care for monotone music. He said: 'I play the flute with seven holes and make different ragas and raginis. I enjoy food made of different dishes.' On December 9, 1898, during the installation ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's relics in Belur Math, Vivekananda prophesied: 'It will be a centre in which will be recognized and practised a grand harmony of all creeds and faiths as exemplified in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and religion in its universal aspect alone will be preached; and from this centre of universal toleration will go forth the shining message of good will, peace, and harmony.'

Belur Math is truly holy ground. Here on this land Sri Ramakrishna himself walked while visiting the lumber yard of Captain Upadhyaya. Holy Mother also came here several times, and all sixteen disciples lived here or often visited this place. It is really a very special place. After inaugurating the Belur monastery, Vivekananda lived three years and eight months, and he stayed in his room here one year, six months, and twenty-six days. His spirit is still active and inspiring millions.

Symphony of Religions

Although I am not a connoisseur of Western music, I sometimes go to the symphony. I watch a hundred musicians onstage with their instruments: each one of them contributes to the music, and thus all create the symphony. If the violinists, or flutists, or drummers, or any individual group thought that only it should be onstage, then it would be a different type of performance, which might be appreciated by a few but not by the majority. It is the duty of the conductor to arrange the music in such a way that each musician takes part in the symphony and gives joy to the audience.

To me, God is the great conductor in the symphony of life. He created all religions; He manifests Himself in all religions; He listens to the prayers of people of all religions; and He bestows His grace on all His children. We would not care for a God who was only for the Hindus, or Muslims, or Christians, or Buddhists, or Jews, or any other individual faith.

In 1984 a Catholic interviewer of a TV station asked me, 'Swami, are the Hindu God, Christian God, Jewish God, or Muslim God different?' I replied: 'When you see the sun, can you say that it is a Hindu sun, a Christian sun, a Jewish sun, or a Muslim sun?' 'I got the answer,' he said.

In this memorable convention celebrating Swami Vivekananda's 150th anniversary, let us listen to the wonderful music of harmony and try to practise it in our daily lives. This is the only way we shall be able to get rid of narrowness, bigotry, superstition, violence, and disharmony. The nearer we are to God, the closer we shall feel to other religions. In God we all meet. Krishna said in the Gita, 'I am the thread that runs through the pearls, as in a necklace.' Each religion is one of the pearls.

In conclusion, I bow down to all religions and their representatives on this platform. These representatives have come from different parts of the world to contribute their precious voices to this symphony. This symphony will not be presented in vain. History will record it as a landmark for posterity.

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Swami Vivekananda's input to Hinduism and the world at large

Swami Amarananda

President, Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Switzerland

Sister Nivedita wrote a wonderful foreword for the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda in 1907. These works, according to her, was both the gospel to humanity and the Charter of the Hindu Faith; in this Charter, Hinduism itself was generalised by a Hindu mind of the highest order.

Swamiji revitalised Hinduism culling all fundamental and essential ideas of that religious culture. Suddenly that religious culture, which had been judged unfavourably by Christian missionaries and by three generations of reformers coming before him, found its common bases, self-respect and confidence. The great ovation which Swamiji received after his landing on the Indian soil in 1897 is the visible indicator of the sentiment of a people which discovered that they had been denigrated and persecuted because of misconception and motivated propaganda targeting their religion, and because of loss of political freedom since the last decade of twelfth century.

The Brahmo and Arya Samaj movements decried Puja which had dominated the religious landscape of Hindus for more than two thousand years since the days of Emperor Ashoka. They were vociferous against many practices of Hindus. Swamiji upheld the symbolism implicit in Puja system of Hindus, and showed the futility of utilising one's energy in the crusade against superstitions, because they would disappear as soon as masses are strengthened through nourishment and education. The trust in themselves of the Hindus and the unifying message of Swamiji were the main ingredients of the evident renaissance of the assertive Hinduism, which began to become not apologetic about the puja practice, and reject the denigration by all sections of Indians except the core Hindus. Lord Curzon's policy acted as the grand catalyst in the spreading of Swamiji's message like a forest fire, notably in Bengal.

It is not without reason that Rajaji, the last governor-general of India, who had met Swamiji in his youth, was of the opinion that India's freedom would have been impossible without Swamiji's contribution to Hinduism. And this Indian freedom in 1947 set in motion a socio-political cascade that manifested as the liberation from colonialism of so many millions of people across continents. This fiesta of freedom reversed the injustice and greed which prolonged for more than five centuries, and which were inherent in the colonial expansion which collapsed in our lifetime.

The symbolism in Hinduism had its detractors among a large section of the assembly which composed the Indian Constitution. In our jurisprudence there is still the shadow of this phenomenon. But this symbolism got a boost in secular India through the judgement written in an attempt to give an answer to the question posed by the Supreme Court of India in connection with the Shirur Mutt case, namely, the line to be drawn between what are matters of religion and what are not. The said judgement was authored by Justice B.K. Mukherjea in 1954; he observed: "A religion undoubtedly has its basis in a system of beliefs or doctrines which are regarded by those who profess that religion as conducive to their spiritual well-being, but it would not be correct to say that religion is nothing else but a doctrine or belief. A religion may not only lay down a code of ethical rules for its followers to accept, it might prescribe rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as integral parts of religion ..."

But truly speaking, Swamiji based his formulation regarding the puja practice on deeper foundations. The archavatara doctrine of Ramanuja which says that there is an especial descent of God in the icon or idol or any symbol worshipped with deep veneration, was validated stupendously in the life of Swamiji's master. Swamiji was a witness of this, and he himself experienced the truth of this doctrine in Amarnath cave and Kshirbhavani temple in Kashmir. But what Swamiji did not like was the spiritual evolution generated through a sincere worship remaining cloistered within the four walls of the shrine without having a role in the society.

Nation-building can be done by inciting hatred against other religions, ethnicities, languages etc., in other words, through chauvinism which highlights the capacity of a group of people to subjugate others. But



Swamiji came to preach a religion to which each of the diverse religions was “only a travelling, a coming up, of different men, and women, through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal”. His message was as vast as the Vedantic oneness which he chanted and which he experienced mystically.

This oneness proclaimed in Vedantic dicta or mahāvākyas satisfied Swamiji’s thirst for philosophical

enquiry; his Buddha-like heart, which felt suffering which pervades the human society, found in it something which would deify all attempts to alleviate this ubiquitous misery. So he gave stress on it in the West of which the deep anguish coexisting with affluence he felt. He also believed that in the East, if and when the impoverished people get food and education, they would be ready to apply this oneness which their ancestors had formulated, both individually and collectively.

Swamiji was a bridge between the East and the West, between the ancient heritage and the modern innovations, between wisdom and action, and between all sincere people confused with the diversity of religious doctrines. He could engage six western persons who would serve life-long for the causes which were dear to his heart. The universal message of the Gita was given in the context of the diversity present in Sanatana Dharma. Swamiji’s message was given in the context in which India-based religions, the Abrahamic religions and the religious traditions of the Far East were commingled, in the context in which science was challenging the very basis of religion. He symbolised that harmony, otherwise he could not have attracted the loving attention of a scientist of the stature of Tesla.

From his adolescence, he was imbued with the great idea of John Stuart Mill in Three Essays on Religion that religious doctrines should be verified as scientific hypotheses are done, before their general acceptance. So he doubted, tested his master’s pronouncements, and was fortunately successful in discovering the essential truth underlying religions. He chanted the glory of reason, which coupled with purity and patience, would lead man to supra-consciousness.

One of his gifts to humanity was the over-all shape he gave to the Order of Ramakrishna of which the greatest purposes were to raise the society through the spiritual wisdom, and to practise the harmonious blending of different yogas. He raised money to finance the fledgling Order, gave direction to its activities, composed the general rules for the monastery as well as the vespers for the Order, and trained monks and his successors. Never, after the great boom of Buddhism, India saw the surging enthusiasm of monks to serve the people in distress in India, and to explain the high principles of philosophy to people beyond the shores of India.

In his vision the Order of Ramakrishna should embrace both men and women; but this nunnery for women, for various reasons, came into being belatedly. The monks and the authorities of Belur Math remembered Swamiji’s unequivocal wishes in favour of a Math for women. On 27th December 1953 the first batch of women renunciates received the ochre robes from Swami Shankarananda, the then president of the Order of Ramakrishna. We have said that six persons of western origin were so close to Swamiji that they served his causes throughout their lives; four among these six persons were ladies. The school founded by Nivedita was inaugurated by Sarada Devi as early as November 1898.

He expressed his gratitude to his master who had taken away doubt from his mind, who had opened for him the gate of the highest kind of Samadhi, who would praise him to the effect that he was matchless, and who posthumously supported him in various ways in his mission and forewarned him about great dangers. Yet he was reticent about foisting upon the Christians such a beloved master; he chose rather to broadcast the principles for which Ramakrishna came to this world. He knew that the lower category of people would cling to the person and the other superior category would take the principles. He was also the first among the direct disciples of Ramakrishna to talk about the wonderful significance of the life of Sarada Devi.

Hope, endurance, fearlessness, faith and love were the key words in Swamiji’s message. Romain Rolland said that Swamiji was a man fabricated with energy which he preached to man. What is the source of that energy? He himself came, according to his master, from the circle of seven ancient sages of India. His master passed to him especially the powers which he would need to accomplish his mission. His master clearly indicated that he would teach humanity. He practised austerities before beginning his public life in 1893. It is impossible for us to fathom his spiritual experiences. He was also both a learned and a learning monk who used to finish reading books at an incredible speed. Before taking each big step in his life, he relied on the divine commandment. So what we see as Swamiji’s achievement is really the work of God.





Sri Ramakrishna and Truth Swami Dayatmananda

Former President, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK

‘God is Truth’, says Gandhiji. He also said: ‘The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face’.

Sri Ramakrishna came to demonstrate that the goal of human life is God-realization and it can be achieved by uncompromising adherence to truth.

Truthfulness is the Tapasya (austerity) of this age of Kali. Unless one always speaks the truth, one cannot find God Who Is the soul of truth.

One must be very particular about telling the truth. Through truth one can realize God.

Devotion matures into right discrimination, renunciation, love of all creatures, service to pious men, keeping company with the devoted, singing the praises of the Lord, truthfulness and other virtues.

There are signs of God-realization. Know that there is no more delay for him to realize God, in whom you mark the efflorescence of devotion.

Satya and Dharma

There is a close connection between righteousness and Truth. The moral instructions of our ancient Upanishadic teachers begin with ‘Satyam vada, Dharmam chara, etc., Speak Truth, act righteously’.

The Definition of Dharma is:—‘that which helps us to attain worldly prosperity and salvation is Dharma.’ For attaining both these Truth is the fundamental virtue. In the Upanishads it is said that Truth and righteousness are one and the same. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad declares:

What is righteousness is indeed Truth. Hence people say of one speaking what is true, that he speaks what is righteous, or of one speaking what is righteous, that he speaks what is true because both of them are but righteousness.

In the Bhagavata it is stated that, Truth is the flower and fruit of the tree, that is the living body.

Truth is the virtue to be realized if one wants to reach the final liberation. What is meant by Truth? That which remains forever is Truth. The whole world is untrue because it will not remain forever. When the universe ceases to exist during the final dissolution, God alone exists. He is beginningless and endless; God is the only truth. The way to reach God is also called truth.

Truth in scriptures

The Mundaka Upanishad proclaims that Truth alone triumphs, not untruth; the divine path i.e. the life of spirit is paved with truth. (3.1.6).

The same Upanishad again says: The Atman can be realized only through truth and Tapas.

In the Puranas also we hear beautiful stories illustrating the greatness of truth. The exemplary characters of the Puranas are those who have given up everything for the sake of truth, King Harischandra, for instance. He sells his wife and only child and himself becomes the servant of a Chandala in order to keep up his word.

King Bali is another hero who lost everything for the sake of truth. He even disobeyed his Guru to keep the word he had given to the Lord Vishnu who came in the disguise of a dwarf, and thereby received



the blessings of the Lord. In spite of all the humiliations he had to undergo, King Bali did not give up his truthfulness. By adherence to truth he attained the lord.

In the Ramayana we see Sri Rama, the very embodiment of truth, saying: (Ayodhya: 10.9.13).

Truth is the Lord of the world, and prosperity depends on Truth. All originate from Truth, there is nothing greater than Truth."

He again says:—the whole world is established in truth. So righteousness and truth are the greatest pillars on which the universe rests.

Sri Ramakrishna and truth

No wonder therefore that Sri Ramakrishna, whose advent on earth was for the establishment of Dharma, upholds truth through all his words and deeds. He says, the best name that we can give to God is Truth. Under no circumstance should one give up truth.

Even those who are engaged in worldly activities such as office work or businesses should hold to truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in Kaliyuga. (Gospel, p. 109)

He especially instructs householders: If a man leads a householder's life, he must have unflagging devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone. (ibid p. 369).

Even in trifling matters he could not deviate from truthfulness. As a child he had promised the blacksmith woman Dhani that he would receive his first Bhiksha after the sacred thread ceremony from her. Gadadhar insisted on fulfilling his promise and the custom-bound elders had to agree to that 'unorthodox' step.

How deeply the spirit of truthfulness was ingrained in his nature and how the Divine Mother protected him from the least deviation from truth is provided by the 'opium incident.'

Sambhucharan Mallik had a dispensary for the poor in his garden. Learning that Sri Ramakrishna was suffering from diarrhoea, he advised him to take a few doses of opium, and offered to give some before he left. Sri Ramakrishna accepted. But in the course of the conversation both forgot all about it. After taking his leave, the Master took a few steps, when he remembered about the opium. Coming back he found that Sambhu was very busy.

Not wishing to trouble him, Sri Ramakrishna took a little opium from one of the men in charge and again set out for the Kali temple. But to his surprise he found that though he was perfectly familiar with the locality, he kept straying into wrong path. Casting his eyes behind, he could plainly see the path leading to Sambhu's place, but the way ahead was not clear.

Wondering, he started again for Rani Rasmani's garden carefully noting the way. Again he became confused. He could not find the right path and felt a backward pull as well. After repeated struggles it suddenly dawned on him that Sambhu had asked him to take the opium from him, not from his agent, who had no right to give it without the master's permission. He might have been guilty of falsehood and theft if the Divine Mother had not deterred him! So he threw the package back through a window, calling out as he did so, Look, I am returning you the opium.

Now as he set out for the temple, he could see the way clearly.

Referring to this incident he said afterwards, "It is because I placed my whole responsibility upon the Mother, that She holds me by the hand and never allows me to stray even by an inch from truth!"

Very often Sri Ramakrishna used to show his displeasure to those who did not observe truth in their words and deeds. Once he said to Shivanath, one of his devotees:

It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth, he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses

everything.

Every moment Sri Ramakrishna was conscious of this fact in his life. If a disciple told a lie and came to him he used to turn his face away from the disciple. He did not preach anything that he did not practise in his life. He could give up everything, but could not give up truth. Sri Ramakrishna himself revealed this nature of his when he was talking to devotees:

If by chance I say that I will go to the pine grove, I must go there even if there is no immediate need for it; otherwise I lose my hold on truth.

After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: 'Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance, take them both and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness, take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil, take them both and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thy unrighteousness, take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.' I mentioned all these, but I could not say: 'Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood, take them both.' I gave up everything at Her feet, but could not bring myself to a position of giving up truth" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. p. 255)

Such was Master's love for truth. He was an incarnation of Eternal truth and he demonstrated how to practise truth in day-to-day life.

In our own troubled times, when unrighteousness seems to have a field day, the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the apostle of Truth, stand as beacon-light that can guide the world to peace and happiness. Hence it is that Swami Vivekananda says that, with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, the Satya Yuga (The age of Truth has begun.

May Sri Ramakrishna bless us all with strength to be truthful and righteous in what we think and say and do.

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Through spiritual practices man can overcome his evil tendencies, and divine grace can redeem even the worst sinner. Therefore one should not brood over the past mistakes, but should develop a positive outlook on life by depending on God.

-Sri Ramakrishna

It is idle to expect that dangers and difficulties will not come. They are bound to come. But for a devotee they will pass away under the feet like water.

-Holy Mother

Strength, strength it is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery.

-Swami Vivekananda





Vivekananda: A Harbinger of Harmony

Swami Girishananda

Manager, Ramakrishna Math, Trustees, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission,
President, Ramakrishna Mission Bhava Prachar Parishad, Belur Math, Howrah, India

In the year 1882, Mahendra Nath Gupta met Sri Ramakrishna in the temple garden of Dakshineswar with a friend. It is of course, to This "Boswell" as aldus Huxley aptly calls Him, with his daily notes of the following conversation at Dakshineswar that we owe the incomparable record which in English is called the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Probably, it was about this time, when Sarada Devi was making her first extended stay at Temple garden, That Sri Ramakrishna had an experience which is most attractive and full of significance, we quote from Holy Mother, the biography by Swami Nikhilananda; " One day at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in deep meditation when Sarada Devi entered the room. A slight noise made by her brought his mind down abruptly to the physical plane. Sarada Devi was distressed. In order to consol her he said , ' Do you know what I was seeing when you came in ? I felt it was a far off country where people were of fair complexion. They were different from us and spoke a language I could not understand. As I was wondering about the vision, the Divine mother revealed to me that they would follow my teachings, How sincere their devotion was !

In her book Days in a Indian Monastery Sister Devamata relates this incident as she heard it from Laxmi Devi, the master's niece, who said She was also present on the occasion. According to her version the Master had been in deep Samadhi that he looked lifeless and his feet were rubbed to bring him out.

Also he had remarked, " It is a very beautiful country, I think I shall go there." These small hints coming out of the prophetic vision of Sri Ramakrishna That Swami Vivekananda, his chief disciple through his universal message will bring to the modern world the interfaith reality underlying the truths of all religions of the world " Now a religion to satisfy the largest portion of mankind, must be able to supply food for all these various types of mind and where the capability is wanting, the existing Sects all become one sided

..... This is the existing condition of religion, the existing condition of things. What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds; it must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic and equally conducive to action."

So the harmony of religion can be attained what in Indian language is called Yoga-union. To the worker , it is union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic between his lower and higher self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of love, and the philosopher it is the union of all existence" – ref. "The ideal of a universal religion" Selections of Swami Vivekananda page 152.

About the harmony of religions as highlighted in the life of experience of Sri Ramakrishna was wonderful But would Ramakrishna, one may ask, have had the chance of demonstrating the truth of other religions if he had been a Christian or a Moslem. In spite of much torpidity and local narrow-mindedness, Hinduism was in this respect an almost ideal testing ground. The gift by which Ramakrishna solved this whole problem is by in his simplicity He saw in the various religions not so much institutions in which one spends one's life , but paths leading to union with God. He thus avoided two extremes which are the real enemies of an effective dialogue : narrow minded dogmatism and luke-warm tolerance. As he had realised the divine ground beyond all names and forms, he did not try to found a universal religion, but enjoyed the very variety of the different forms of religious expressions. In one of the experience of Sri Ramakrishna when he visited a Christian Service, the thought alone of the presence of the God on the altar would have caused him to pass into Samadhi, He said, I see that God has become the priest, the altar and the sacrifice – Ah what a vision ! So this is the exposure to the remarkable contribution of Vivekananda in the parliament of Religions held at Chicago.



Harmony and Peace Swami Divyananda

Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math, India

The term 'harmony' usually means a pleasant musical sound made by different notes being played or sung at the same time. When we use the same term in our everyday life harmony means where there are no contradictions. The same concept we call in other way round as unity in diversity. Diversity is the characteristics of nature – whether of Mother Nature or of human nature. Unharmonized diversity leads to chaos and ultimately to destruction. Diversity in human nature is the root of diversity in human society.

Now basically the term 'peace' in individual sense means a state of calmness of mind free from any mental annoyance that caused by worry, problems, noise, or unwanted actions. Peace in social sense implies freedom from any war, conflict or violence especially when people live and work together happily without disagreement. Whether in individual mind or in any human society peace is the ultimate desire.

Diversity is a natural phenomenon – it cannot be avoided. Also, it is not advised to avoid diversity. A patch of monochrome colour never makes a picture – diversity in colours is needed to make it. Again, only a few random patches of diverse colours will

not create a picture. For this, harmonization of colours following some definite pattern is necessary. So is true for diversity in human nature and society nature. In spite of having geodiversity and biodiversity Mother Nature possesses well balanced ecosystem. But sometimes when human interferences cause them out of balance natural disaster happens or affects biodiversity resulting sometimes in extinction of some bio species.

Harmonisation of diversities in human nature leads to human excellence and that in society leads to peaceful existence of human race. Any disharmony in diversities will lead to destruction in both.

Human nature is a combination of general psychological characteristics like thoughts, actions, feelings, communications, skillness etc. of a human being. Both inherent and acquired diverse qualities develop one's nature. A person's personality shapes his or her nature. Human behaviour is the way a person interacts with environment and human nature determines his or her behaviour. Human nature, behaviour or personality all are determined by three fundamental qualities or Gunas as said in Samkhya philosophy. These three Gunas are called: Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. One who is honest, truthful, ascetic, constructive having good moral character, free from jealousy, greed etc. is said to possess Sattwa Guna or Sattwik. Person who are passionate, aggressive, laborious, creative, active, courageous are said to be Rajasik having Raja Guna. On the contrary people who are lazy, greedy, jealous, destructive, chaotic, liar and having other bad qualities are said to be as Tamasik. But in real life no person possesses any Guna absolutely. Each and every person is a combination of these three Gunas. Swattwik people are those in whom the Swattwa Guna predominates. Likewise, Raja Guna and Tama Guna predominate in Rajasik and Tamasik type of people. Human nature development involves maintaining the right proportions of all these three Gunas or qualities.

Now a human society is an agglomeration of people of diverse natures. Society nature is the net result of mutual interactions of individual behaviours. In addition to diversity of individual natures, people in society have different religions, rituals, faiths

and beliefs, ethics, cultures, education, political thoughts and alliances that make the system highly complex. Complete harmonisation of all these factors can never be expected as there will be always differences of opinions, competitions for dominancy and intolerance. Unless there is harmonisation of



all such factors to at least a reasonable level chaos and frequent clashes among ethnic, religious and political groups would shatter the normal and peaceful life of society people.

As it is a many body interaction, individual human nature influences the nature of groups or a society as a whole and the reverse is also true. To establish harmony and peace in a human society – it is the first priority to have harmony in individual's nature. "Charity begins at home" – thus goes the saying. Sri Ramakrishna said – "He is indeed a real man who has harmonized everything". Everybody in a society must follow the path of harmony. Even a finger-counted numbers of fundamentalists and terrorists may create enough disharmony and severe unrest in a society sometimes causing irreparable damages.

Now to establish harmony in one's everyday life one should first consider three basic actions –

- 1) Actions of Mind that implies all sorts of mental activities – planning, thinking, meditating, analysing, judging etc.
- 2) Actions of Mouth – talking, lecturing, teaching like all sorts of verbal communications with others.
- 3) Actions of Body – all sorts of physical works, body movements etc.

To harmonize all three actions means they should not be contradictory to each other. First of all, there should not be any controversy between one's thoughts and uttered words. One should always speak the truth, express whatever right he judges but not dishonouring other's views. There must not be any contradiction between one's thought and physical actions. It is always advisable to think right or wrong before taking any action as many a times once the wrong action done cannot be reverted. Even the damage control does not help. And lastly there should not be any contradiction between one's words and physical actions otherwise every action will end up in mess.

In order to optimise the tuning of all three actions one must be guided by one's inner values. Only a true Man (considering both genders) can harmonise his all three actions. Now who is a true Man? How beautifully Sri Ramakrishna defined – "Jar maan hunsh aachhe se-i Manus"! One who is conscious about his values (maan) is the real man. Usually a man (or woman) who has a good moral character, virtuous, kind, honest, truthful, unselfish, sympathetic and helping to others – will be regarded as a man (or woman) of high values – no matter he or she is rich or poor.

In a civilized society when there are large number of people who have successfully harmonized their nature, their everyday life, it will be much easier to establish harmony and peace in the society.

History shows that there are primarily two causes that created disharmony and turmoil repeatedly for dominancy and expansion, devastating the life of people. These are religion and politics. In earlier times imperial rulers had always tried to expand

their empire by winning over other countries through sanguinary battles causing much devastation in enemy countries. This practice is now things of past although not totally abolished. For the last two thousand years religions became the other strong source of

disintegration in society. A true and properly understood religion is the greatest source of integration, harmony and peace in a society or nation. But historical experiences show that, misunderstood and misinterpreted religion and sometimes use of such

religion in social, cultural and political life for vested interests, created disintegration and disharmony in society and that led to bloody riots and even ethnic wars.

Now prime objective of religion is to guide mankind in the path of harmony and peace. But unfortunately, many a times, it itself caused infightings, riots, arsons and even long drawn wars, destroying human lives and properties. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation of scriptures along with utilizing religion for vested interest and personal gain by some so-called religious leaders, devalued every religion which is evident from the visible gulf between their spiritual ideals and the activities of religious communities.

Our practical life contradicts the spiritual ideals we endorse in theory. Selfishness, greed and power-loving mentality are the sources of injustice, cruelty and exploitation and are responsible for corruption in public life and communalizing politics. This was pointed out by Swami Vivekananda popularly known as Swamiji, in his legendary introductory speech in World Parliament of Religion in 1893 held in

Chicago - "...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 civilization 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".

Organised religion or institutional religions have systematically arranged and formally established belief systems and rituals. They have specified rules and practices and paths of God worship. Every such religion has three parts Spirituality, Scriptures and

Rituals. From spirituality point of view all religions are same. Scriptures also say the same thing more or less sometimes in different ways. It is the rituals, where all sorts of differences and disagreements arise as these mostly depend on time, place, nature, status, culture, education, beliefs, prejudice etc of people.

It is unfortunate that most people today whether educated or uneducated consider the visible rituals as the true religion ignoring the spirituality or going through the scriptures. Many a times priests and so-called spiritual leaders or socio-religious heads prescribe some concocted do's and don'ts that are utterly superstitious and bear no logic which people blindly accept and follow. So many a times people with progressive and scientific bent of mind debate on these rituals thereby misinterpret the true meaning and spirit of religions and thus lose faith in religion and God. Living a true religious life means to practice and maintain all moral values and to be pure in body and mind as far as practicable. And here some rituals that helps many to the path of true religion have relevance. The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the significance of the term religion lead to all the troubles faced by as well as caused by

religion. Moreover, in each religion there are some fundamentalist persons who have very dogmatic views of philosophy of their own religion and hatred for others. "Each religion brings out its own doctrines and insists upon them as being the only true ones. And not only does it do that, but it thinks that he who does not believe in them must go to some horrible place." – so said Swamiji.

It is very true that if properly understood and practiced, religion can give mankind the greatest harmony and peace. We remember what Swamiji said – "...each religious sect has claimed the exclusive right to live. And thus, we find that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion".

History shows that many a times whenever human societies faced severe moral degradation and started to follow various corrupt practices in the name of religion, there came some great souls who as true socio-religious reformers led mankind for few centuries to proper and correct religious and moral paths and thus saved mankind from destruction. Such illustrious socio-religious teachers like Gautam Buddha, Jesus Christ, Hazarat Muhammad, Mahavir Jain, Guru Nanak, Sri Chaitanya and in modern age Sri Ramakrishna taught people how to lead a true moral and spiritual life for sustenance by keeping peace and harmony in society. Their teachings were primarily

on spirituality and prescribed rituals that enhances the moral values and purifies one in body and mind. They reformed the spiritual path making it easy ride for all people. These world teachers never created any new religion – they only reformed the traditional religion to which they belonged to suit the age. Unfortunately, later on mostly their close disciples and succession of disciples, devotees and followers gradually separated themselves from traditional religion to establish a new organized religion in their

teacher's name, creating new scriptures and rituals. Thus, the religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism were born. Subsequently in each religion gradually formed various sects and subsects each under the influence of a spiritual guru or religious head. They differ in their faiths and beliefs and in order to gain supremacy and authority in society started to uphold their dogmatic views denigrating other's and that resulted sometimes with the backing of political leaders and rulers into inter-religion as well as intra-religion infightings, riots and even longdrawn war like Crusades, resulting in loss of properties and human lives and destroying integrity, peace and harmony in society or country to a large extent.

Apart from religious ideologies, differences in political ideologies and power struggle by political parties also create much disharmony and chaos that very often lead to frequent infightings between supporters of different political parties, loot arson, loss

of property and lives. Going through internet one can easily find information that more than a million people died and property loss of unaccounted amount due to ethnic wars and clashes, civil wars, insurgencies, terrorist activities by different political organizations in Afro-Asian countries in last decade.

For the survival and sustainable development of human society maintaining peace and harmony is the most primary necessity. Diversity in a human society cannot be eliminated but may be united just like making garland from different types of flowers. The thread of unity here would be tolerance or more appropriately as Swamiji called acceptance. Now what is tolerance? The term tolerance is to recognize and respect other's beliefs and rituals or other practices without sharing in them or it can also be described as a respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's religion, cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human.

Now all great religious teachers taught mankind to coexist through love and nonviolence, lead a simple and pious life with faith in God. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa the greatest spiritual master of the present age especially preached the harmony of all religions and all religious paths and doctrines. Very often he said to his disciples and devotees that the Ultimate Reality is one; but it is personal as well as impersonal, and is indicated by different names (such as God, Ishwar, Allah etc) in different religions just as same water is called by different names like Water, Jal, Pani or Aqua. The Ultimate Reality can be realized through various paths taught in world religions. All religions are true in so far as they lead to the same ultimate Goal. One must not be fanatic or dogmatic (must not possess Matuar Buddhi) for his own religion. Sri Ramakrishna himself did intense practice or Sadhana following different religions and paths and succeeded to reach the same goal of realisation of ultimate truth and so he declared: "As many faiths, so many paths" (Jato Mat Tato Path).

Now a days it is observed that two tendencies are gradually growing up – there are lots of educated people, scientists and intellectuals whose views are that ours is a selfcreated universe and God has no role in it – he is non-existent. Scientific theories are all well established and supported by practical experiments whereas Religious concepts are contradictory and "religion is opium for the people" (Karl Marx). On the contrary there are people who have very dogmatic views over their own religion and blind faiths over religious rituals, rules and restrictions that are sometimes superstitious and corrupt. Many religious masters and heads instigate their followers for gaining supremacy and vested interest. Many a times political leaders utilize various religious groups and sects for their electoral interest.

It is absolutely necessary to understand – 'What is religion?' Swamiji defined – "Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man". Swamiji also said that each soul is potentially divine. There is no difference between the concepts of God and

divinity. Due to more Tamasik and partly Rajasik Gunas human being is a degenerated God and it is his primary endeavour and objective to acquire more and more Satwa Guna through the path of religion to recover his full divinity. For religion teaches one to be kind, honest, truthful, non-violent, non-avaricious – religion makes one pure in body and mind. So, practice of true religion will always establish harmony and peace in society.



Now as per Vedanta philosophy God is infinite in space and time, undivided, formless, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent entity. It may be looked upon as an infinite ocean of energy from which everything living or non-living are created, by which they are fostered and in which they return after annihilation. If this God be named as creator then the creator and its creation are no different but same entity. Now creation, fostering or destruction all are actions and no action is possible without energy. So, God is no different from all-pervasive energy. In fact, every object in the universe is nothing but lumps of energy floating in an infinite ocean of energy just as lumps of ice float in the North Sea. Thus God-created universe and self-created universe are essentially same. So those who understand the concept of God and religion properly will appreciate what Swamiji said that Science and Religion are not contradictory rather complimentary. Otherwise misunderstanding and misconception on both science and religion will lead always to confusion, scepticism and atheism.

Now finally what is to be the roadmap for establishing harmony and peace in today's society. Shall we advocate for abolishing all institutional religions and forming a universal religion? No this is very difficult and there is no need for it. Rather acceptance of religious pluralism is easier approach. Essence of religion is the realization of hidden divinity within each individual and that can be attained through any proven religious path as guided by all the organised religions. The goal is one but the approaching paths may be different. One need not change one's own religion inherited by birth. One must have faith and love for his or her own religion and accept other religions with profound respects. One must realize that each religion has produced very high spiritually enlightened souls who reached the pinnacle of their sadhana stage and achieved the highest level of realization of supreme truth. "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 the individuality and grow according to his own law of growth" – so said Swamiji. Sri Ramakrishna who is the only one in the history of mankind to do successful experiments with different religious path strongly advocated that with strong faith and devotion in one's own religion along with deep reverence for other religions and philosophies if someone earnestly seeks for the supreme truth, he will surely get it one day. It is everyone's moral responsibility to upgrade oneself in the way to divinity

following his own path along with accepting others with love and reverence in order to establish harmony and peace in human society. We should always remember what Swamiji said at the concluding session of the Parliament of Religion on 27th September, 1893 – "...It(the conference) 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."

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God dwells in all people but the manifestation of this inner Divinity varies from person to person. In saintly people there is greater manifestation of God. Women are special manifestations of Divine Mother of the Universe, and so are to be treated with respect.

-Swami Vivekananda





Modelling after the Monk

Swami Vimokshananda

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Dublin, Ireland

Source of inspiration

The Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda have become a fountain source for drawing inspiration for ever. His ideals have been shaping the minds of sincere people and serious thinkers. Comity of Nations are coming forward to celebrate his birth anniversary in a much solemn and useful manner. Thousands of young men and women dedicate their lives to serve not only their hearth and home but also the wider world in search of a goal that he has fashioned for this new age. What could be better said of his teaching as ultimate is nothing but his own coined aphorism “aatmano mokshaartham jagat hitaaya cha” – For one’s own liberation and the good of the world?

To be or not to be

A teacher in a Primary School in Durban was asking the pupils the other day what they would like to become in the future. Well, every child has its own aspiration and was giving vent to his/her feelings. The Ma’m was quite happy to listen to the replies that ran in the expected lines. But one child gave an unusual answer that alarmed her. He said that he would like to become a monk! She instantly contacted the parents and told them that there was something wrong with their child. She wanted to interview the parents as ‘proper grooming’ was not done in the home!

This is a typical reaction of anyone in the world that shows utter surprise if any child wants to become a ‘sannyasin’. Becoming a ‘good devotee’ is fully acceptable in the society but becoming a ‘renunciate’? No.

This is in spite of our learning from the scriptures and the hoary Hindu tradition that of the four ashramas, ‘sannyasa ashrama’ is the ultimate. But how many of us believe in that? How many parents actually encourage their child, if he wants to don ochre robes? And it has become so common to think that there are ‘better’ things to do in Life than to become a mere monk!

Song on Sannyasa

Herein comes a rare gem from the works of Swami Vivekananda that inspired many to become monk and has been a source of inspiration to many even today. That is a poem ‘The Song of the Sannyasin’. It has 13 verses. These verses came out from his pen in an inspired mood when Swamiji stayed seven weeks in a cottage at Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence River in New York State. He composed this magnificent, eloquent Song paying tribute to the supremacy of the sannyasa ashram.

I remember how when I was a school-goer, how I would intently listen to one of our wonderful teachers, ‘Mandiram Sir’ as we used to address him, chanting this Song in tune and explain every verse, every word to the great delight of me! This Sir was a veritable encyclopedia on Swamiji who would enchant the listening students to the all-absorbing renunciate ideas of Swamiji. He would always present me and a few other students who would gather around him to learn about Swamiji, other quotes that deeply impressed our young minds.

The Cottage Call

His oft-repeat quote to me was from Sister Nivedita’s famous book “Notes on Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda” wherein she recounts the most inspiring words of Swamiji : “Never forget, to say to yourself, and to teach to your children, as the difference between a firefly and the blazing sun, between the infinite ocean and a little pond, between a mustard-seed and the mountain of Meru, such is the difference between the householder and the Sannyasin.”



Hundreds of monks today acknowledge the wonderful effect of these words on their evolving minds. When I attended the Probationers' Training Centre in Belur Math, a senior monk took a special class to me and a few 'selected' students on this great poem of Swamiji. Its poetic beauty makes a compelling reading, its flowing idea makes radiant impression, its mystical words make a life bloom well. It is said that Swamiji surprisingly, never told anyone about this writing. In 1947 the Cottage where Swamiji stayed went under renovation. Strangely the carpenters who were removing the old wooden walls found a hand-written manuscript, hidden from the world for 52 years after it was penned.

It is said that on his last day August 7, 1895 at the Thousand Islands, Swamiji went into the back woods to meditate and froze solid in meditation and remained oblivious to torrential rain and is said to have achieved nirvikalpa samadhi. He had a unique experience of inner freedom at the Thousand Islands Park which he expressed eloquently in his poem "The Song of the Sannyasin". He wrote from there to a friend: "I am free, my bonds are cut, what do I care whether this body goes or does not go? I have a truth to teach – I am a child of God. And he that gave me the truth will send me fellow workers from the earth's bravest and best."

Listen and learn

When Swamiji visited the Park, he was barely 32 years old (or young?). He had already become world celebrity. Two years before he had made that electrifying address in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Newspapers commented that "he is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament." His whirlwind tour of USA brought him the title 'cyclonic monk'.

Resting at the Park, well-rejuvenated, Swamiji taught 12 students the intricate aspects of spiritual life. His extempore words were noted and transcribed into a book "Inspired Talks". Swamiji used to say that he was "at his best" in Thousand Island Park. It can be safely concluded that ideas and visions that Swamiji had at this Park later paved the way for his work in India and elsewhere.

The Song undoubtedly is a masterpiece. I listen to this Song intermittently. The Song is a beacon light to the youth especially to those who still wonder whether anything 'extra' this life holds for and something 'more' that life can unfold.

Are you one of the 'earth's bravest and best'?

|| Aum tat sat Aum ||

----- X -----

If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt and take him on my lap.

-Holy Mother

The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the Divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith in himself or itself, death comes. Believe first in yourself, and then in God.

-Swami Vivekananda





Bhakti Sangeet—Its History and Place in Inculcating Devotion

Swami Sarvasthananda

President, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK

“Mon chalo nija niketane” soulfully poured out as his first offering by a young Narendranath on his first visit to a deeply moved Sri Ramakrishna whose ecstasies triggered by soulful singing had brought the youth there. Swami Vivekananda once wrote, “Music is the highest art and, to those who understand, is the highest worship.” (CW.Vol.5, p.125). In the modern age, Sri Ramakrishna came not only to rejuvenate India, in the field of religion and spirituality, but also in the field of arts and culture, especially in devotional music, which when understood and practiced perfectly, could be used as a form of worship of the Divine. Music to Swami Vivekananda, was an expression of his inner spiritual urge, and was best understood by his spiritual Master Sri Ramakrishna, who would be often transported into deep Samadhi, on hearing spontaneously sung compositions, in his rich, vibrant and melodious voice with a divine fervour. Swamiji said, “The greatest aid to this practice of keeping God in memory is, perhaps, music. The Lord says to Narada, the great teacher of Bhakti, “I do not live in heaven, nor do I live in the heart of the Yogi, but where My devotees sing My praise, there am I”. Music has such tremendous power over the human mind; it brings it to concentration in a moment.” (CW.Vol.4.p.9)

In India the highest form of music has predominantly been considered as part of our religious traditions. The Hindu deities appeared often with musical instruments; Sarasvati with vina in her hands, Shiva dancing with damaru, Krishna playing the flute, Narada with his tanpura and so on; Hindu iconography is replete with deities symbolizing the role of music in spiritual life. India also gave birth to innumerable saints like Surdas, Purandaradasa, Ramaprasad, Kamalakanta, Narasimha Mehta, Mirabai, Janabai and several others including those belonging to the Buddhist, Jain and Islamic (Sufi) traditions who have demonstrated the spiritual significance of music through their lives and immortal song compositions. As most of our avatars and saints have pointed out, Bhakti is the easiest and the most natural path to the Divine and music opens up the fountain springs of bhakti through nada. Moreover, in the Indian Classical music tradition invariably all musicians and singers consider themselves sadhakas of Nadabrahma. According to Sangitaratnakara, “Nadabrahma is of the nature of Consciousness and Bliss and pervades all living beings. By worshipping It one worships Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara who are unified in It.” Thus there is music in every deep truth, in every higher emotion or bhava, nay in every movement of life. True music should make one feel that the individual is only a fleeting tone in the great world symphony, that nothing can be isolated, and that every objective existence is only the glimpse of a musical note in the current of mysterious and overflowing melody of cosmic life. In his lecture on Ramayana delivered in America, Swamiji says about Indian music, “Drama and music are themselves held to be religion. Any song, if one’s whole soul is in that song, one attains to salvation; one has nothing else to do. They say it leads to the same goal as meditation.” (CW. Vol 4, p.74)

Bhakti or devotion has according to the Bhagvatam tradition(7.5.23-24), nine forms- shravana or listening, kirtana or musical offering, smarana or remembrance, padasevana or service, archana or worship, vandana or salutation, dasyam, or attitude or servitude, sakhyam or friendliness, and atmanivedanam or self-surrender. Kirtana, a form of bhakti sangeet or singing the glory of the Lord has a place of great esteem. What is Bhakti Sangeet? Any music which is an adoration of the Divine in any form – God with form or without form, with qualities or without qualities, in the form of an idol or deity or even adoration of incarnations or exalted saints and divine personages can be termed as Bhakti Sangeet. Here sangeet can cover singing, instrumental music and dancing; “geetam, vadyam, nrityam trayam sangeetamuchyate”. In such music the inexpressible or abstruse mystical truths of the Divine Reality and an intense craving in the human heart to reach out to the Divine are expressed through poetic imagery, chaste and melodious words and elevating music with appropriate ragas, rhythm and tonal quality. Sri Ramakrishna used to often fall into a deep Samadhi while singing or even hearing such songs sung with divine emotion, with correct notes and tunes. He could elevate the minds of the

listeners to a transcendental plane. But he used to feel disturbed when musicians distorted the melodies and notes or broke the rhythm. Bhava or higher feeling is the life of true music and without it music cannot be called Bhakti Sangeet. Swamiji used to say, "There is science in Dhrupad, Kheyal, etc., but it is in Kirtana, ...and other like compositions that there is real music -- for there is feeling. Feeling is the soul; the secret of everything....The science of Dhrupad etc., applied to the music of Kirtana will produce the perfect music." (CW: Vol 7, p.407).

Though the roots of Bhakti Sangeet can be traced to the natural outpourings and prayers of the primitive man it is in the literature of Sama Veda that we first find sages intoning mantras in beautiful and resonant music. The first song in the Sama Veda begins with "agna yahivitaye- O Agni come to the feast"; this is a line from the Rig Veda and it is transformed by addition of more vowels and sounds called stobha which have no meaning but add to the melody and rhythm. In the earlier portions of the Vedas we see how prayers were mono-tonic and how they evolved into di-tonic, tri-tonic and so on till a full septa-tonic scale was reached. There was a form of music called Pathya sangeet, which according to Bharata was systematized and had saptaswaras, sthanas, varnas, alankaras and angas. By the time of the Mahabharata the seven notes or shadja were well established and music was a subject of study, as gandharva shastra whose musical text was called Dattilam. The Dattilam smooths the way from sama gayan to raga based music by introducing 18 melodic structures called jatis. The Harivamsha (2nd to 5th AD) introduced in the Mahabharata refers to the Chalikiya genre of songs in the gandharva tradition and the Hallisakha dance. Buddhist and Jain traditions refer to music with their devotional compositions like the Therigatha and Sthanagasutra. The Natya Shastra (3rd - 5th AD) of Bharata Muni traces the origins of music to Brahma himself. This great text introduces the idea of rasa or aesthetic rapture as manifesting due to the conjunction of causes. Initially there were only eight rasas which included eroticism, humour, anger, compassion, disgust, horror, valour and wonder; to this was later added tranquility by the ninth century and with the advent of the Bhakti theology by Rupa Goswami in the 16th Century, Bhakti or devotion became a separate overarching rasa which influences and seeps each of the above rasa for the seeker. When Narada wrote his Shiksha (2nd-3rd AD) it is believed that Deshi music with its full seven notes was already prevalent. Interestingly we find sage Narada is held as the foremost Acharya of bhakti as well as music. When music becomes an instrument in the hands of a bhakta or saint art gets converted into sadhana. The outpouring of a saint's heart will be better assimilated and propagated if delivered through the sweet medium of ennobling music.

In the late 6th Cent.AD Matanga wrote the Brihaddeshi and was the first to distinguish Margi or classical from folk and popular music - the deshi tradition. It is popularly believed that the formal periodisation of the bhakti movement was born in south India around the 6th Cent.AD with the songs of the Alvars and Nayanmars. Then we find it spreading to all corners of India being nurtured by the innumerable Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, Natha etc., sects of Hinduism and even Bauddha - Jaina sects which sprang up during different periods of Indian religious history. From the 13th Cent. AD onwards we also see the influence of Islam and other religious sects which thrived in India during that period. The Alvars of the south spread Vishnu bhakti along with their mystic experiences through Tamil prabandhas lyrics enhanced by melody and rhythm. The Alvars, which literally means "those immersed in Divine Love", sang praises of Vishnu as they travelled from one place to another. Andal, the sole woman among the twelve Alvar saints, was like Mira, dedicated to her chosen Deity Ranganatha from a very young age. Her immortal composition, Thiruppaavai, is sung extensively to this day. Shiva bhakti was spread throughout south India by the great Nayanmar saints through their immortal Tirumurai, a compilation of hymns on Shiva by sixty-three Nayanmar poet-saints. Thirujnanasambandar, a Nayanmar is depicted like a dancing child singing with cymbals in hand. Karaikkal Ammaiyar, is one of three women Nayanmars and is considered the first saint poetess of India. Tiruvachakam of Manikkavachakar is said to be the greatest testament of love and it is often said that if one is not moved by reading it one will not be moved by anything else in world literature. Some women saints like Akka Mahadevi of the Veerashaiva cult have composed songs known as vachanas full of spiritual import and are sung even today. The great Acharya of Vishishtadvaita Sri Ramanuja ordained the beautiful rendering of prabandhas in temples. The Charyapada is a collection of mystical poems, songs of realization in the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism composed around the 8th century in the eastern part of India and set to beautiful tunes. Jayadeva's Gita Govinda uses the same

poetical structures employed by the Charyapada and appears to have employed some of the same ragas. There were also notable musical poets like Vidyapati and Chandidas in the east who contributed to this repertoire. The Natha sect which spread its influence through the entire northern and western parts of India up to Rajasthan and Maharashtra also used music (treatise Shivasvarodaya) to spread their cult. Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath were good in music and were experts on the pakhawaj. The 15th Cent. AD saw a great revival of Bhakti traditions that are attributed to Swami Ramananda at Varanasi and important bhakti poets that he inspired included Tulsidas, whose Ramcharitmanas remains central to the Hindi heartland. There was also the great Nirguni poet Kabir whose songs continue to inspire generations, as also Ravidas, Dhanna and other Ramanandis. The great bhakti movement led by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his disciples like Rupa Goswami popularized bhajan and Hari kirtana as a means to realize God in the northern and eastern parts of India. The movement also spread to the south and has taken deep roots under the name namasankirtana sampradaya. In his famous treatise Bhaktirasamritasindhu, Rupa Goswami elaborately describes gradations of bhakti from its lowest stage of sraddha (faith) up to its highest stage of maha-bhava (ultimate ecstasy in love of Godhead). The Bhagavatam also was popularized through musical recitals in places of worship. The equivalent of kirtana is called the devaranama in Kannada language. Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa and Vijayadasa are some of the very prominent among the composers of devaranamas. Purandaradasa is also considered to be the father of Carnatic classical music. The name of Tyagaraja as a musician saint is very well known and his immortal kritis are very popular throughout south India and he is just one of the golden trinity of Vaggeyakaras or composers that included Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri. His kritis have left an abiding influence upon the people of all ranks of life; the sweetness and sublimity of his compositions have enraptured many hearts, and has guided many a soul on the path of real bhakti through the medium of music. Indeed almost the entire corpus of Carnatic classical music is devotional.

With the spread of the bhakti movement in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan great poet saints and their followers used the medium of music to spread bhakti and left behind immortal compositions which are popular to this day. The equivalent of kirtanas in Marathi language is known as abhangas. Prominent among the composers are Jnanadev, Namadev, Ekanath, Tukaram, and others. There were several women saints of the Varikari cult like Janabai, Bahinabai, Soyrabai, Muktabai and Kanhopatra whose songs are sung in congregations accompanied by graceful dance even now. The cult of Vitthala, though of Karnataka origin, was made popular by them in Maharashtra, as it was done by Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa, Vijayadasa and other saints in Karnataka. In Gujarat, Rajasthan and northern parts of India kirtana is also known as bhajan. Mirabai with her immortal Krishna bhakti has inspired countless devotees through her bhajans full of the bhavas of viraha and milana. They are sung not only in folk traditions but also by classical musicians. Surdas was a blind saint, poet and musician, known for his devotional songs dedicated to Lord Krishna. Surdas is said to have written and composed a hundred thousand songs in his magnum opus the 'Sur Sagar', out of which only about 8,000 are extant. He is considered to be the foremost among the eight disciples of Vallabhacharya who gave rise to the Ashtachhaap stream of music that was systematized by Goswami Vitthalnathji and also formalized ritual singing called Haveli Sangeet.

Due to the influence of Chaitanya and his disciples, the Vaishnava poet saints of Bengal and eastern part of India are many and their compositions are vast. Though the Shakta poet saints are few they have left a deep influence on the people and even attracted Muslim devotees and disciples. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of singing the inspired songs of Ramprasad, Kamalakanta (sometimes referred to as Shyama sangeet) and others and often passed into an ecstatic mood while singing or hearing them. Though both Ramprasad and Kamalakanta were Shaktas they had Vaishnava gurus and therefore Vaishnavism and Shaktism have wonderfully blended in their lives and compositions. Another sect of musicians called Bauls has harmonized in their compositions traces of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism. Their songs embrace the essence of the scriptures of all sects in a very spontaneous way. They form an important class of Bengali folk songs rich in mysticism as well as musical content.

In Sikhism, Bhakti of nirguni (devotion to divine without attributes) is emphasized. Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and the founder of Sikhism, was a Nirguni Bhakti saint. Almost all the Gurus composed religious songs and hymns which are set to music and are sung in different ragas. The Granth Sahib also

includes the songs of other saints, several Hindu and some Muslim.

In India music has helped to transmit Sufi Islam too. In Sufism, the term music is called “sa’ma” or literary audition. This is where poetry would be sung to instrumental music; this ritual would often put Sufis into spiritual ecstasy commonly seen in whirling dervishes dressed in white cloaks. Sufism spread widely through their popular songs known as qawwali. One of the biggest contributors to the musical Sufi tradition was Amir Khusru, a disciple of Nizamuddin Chishti. Amir was known as the most talented musical poet in the early Muslim period of India and is said to have founded a system of musicology, the Indraprastha Mata or Chaturdandi sampradaya. He is considered the founder of Indo-Muslim devotional music traditions.

Swami Vivekananda was as great a poet and musician as a spiritual teacher and has left behind quite a few hymns and devotional songs. Some of them, like the famous vesper song, “Khandana Bhava Bandhana...” sung in chorus in all monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order, were set to tune and perfect rhythm in the Dhrupad style of music. If we read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, a large part of Ramakrishna’s teaching was done through music. How often would he use songs in his sweet ambrosial voice to impress upon the minds of devotees some important spiritual truth? We also find him telling again and again that ‘singing the name and glories of God’ is a very easy way to attain true bhakti. His injunction to the devotees, “Bhakti is the only essential thing. One obtains love of God by constantly chanting His name and singing His glories,” establishes the importance of Bhakti Sangeet as a sure means of realizing the Divine in the present age.

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Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disturb your mind. Do everything that is necessary in the proper time, and let your mind be always fixed on God.

-Sri Ramakrishna

If my son wallows in the dust or mud, it is I who have to wipe all the dirt and take him on my lap.

-Holy Mother

The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the Divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith in himself or itself, death comes. Believe first in yourself, and then in God.

-Swami Vivekananda



Ancient Wisdom for Modern India

Swami Sarvapriyananda

Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society, New York, USA

Introduction

India, we are given to understand, is at the cusp of a great demographic dividend from the extraordinarily high proportion of the young in her population. The youth of modern India need ideals which are in tune with their aspirations and yet rooted in the values of their ancient motherland. Swami Vivekananda's remarkable interpretation of the Vedanta philosophy has given Indians an identity that is universal yet uniquely Indian, and inclusive of her richly diverse multicultural society, a philosophy that is both inspiring and rational (and accommodative), and ethics that are well grounded in Vedantic metaphysics and constitute a very effective response to the inequities and corruption widespread in society. Combining service with spirituality, grounding religion in rationality and being very contemporary in its sensitivities, Swami Vivekananda's thought is poised to become the ideology of the modern Indian nation. This paper will outline the unique aspects of Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta and its implications in terms of values and practical philosophy.

The Philosophical Core: The One and the many

What is the essence, the unique core of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy? When one enquires about the core of Sankara's philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, the answer is evident. 'Brahma satyam, jagat mithya, jiva Brahmaiva na parah'. Sankaracarya holds that Brahman is the only reality and the many which we perceive is mithya, an appearance, an illusion. When you ask Ramanujacarya about the core of his philosophy, Visistadvaita, he will tell you that Brahman is the whole and sentient beings, the jivas, are parts of Brahman, as is the entire insentient universe. The One is the whole and the many, jiva and jagat, are Its parts. The term Visistadvaita in fact means Jiva, Jagat visista Brahma - hence, Visistadvaita - Brahman (God the Ultimate Reality) qualified by sentient beings, Jivas and the insentient universe, Jagat. God is amsi (the whole), we are amsa-s (parts). God is the seshi (the complete which 'owns' its integral parts), we are sesha-s (integral parts). We are one with God only in the sense parts of a body are one with the whole body. When you ask the great dualist, Madhvacharya, about his philosophy, he says the One and the many are real, and they are different. Brahman, jivas and jagat - God, sentient beings and the insentient universe - are all distinct realities.

What then would Swami Vivekananda say when asked about his stand?

Swamiji was actually asked this question and his answer is enlightening and very significant. He was asked, 'Is it true that the Buddha said the many are real and changing while orthodox Hinduism teaches that the One is real and the many are false?' Swami replied, 'Yes, and what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have done is to show that the many and the One are the same reality seen by the same mind at different times and different attitudes.' This is the key, I feel, which will help us unlock the varied mysterious and enormous dimension of Swami Viveknanda's teachings.

Swamiji tells us that the One, Brahman, is the only reality and That is appearing as the many, this variegated world. God verily is all that we see, hear and experience in endless ways throughout our lives. Brahman is both transcendental and immanent.

Discovering the Absolute

These are wonderful words indeed, but when we look around we do not find this 'Brahman'. Where is Brahman?

Sri Ramakrishna helps us out here. In his inimitable language, 'Sand and sugar are mixed - the **ant can**



separate them, milk and water are mixed - the swan can separate them, there is maal in golmaal - take the maal, discard the gol (no translation can do justice to the last analogy! Roughly, gol would 'the worthless' and maal, 'valuable', the world being a mixture of the two.)...' Swami Vivekananda was an expert at this separating the two. The very name 'Vivekananda' comes from the Sanskrit word, viveka, which means discrimination, to separate, to differentiate. Swami Ramakrishnananda in his beautiful salutation to Swami Vivekananda says, 'Anitya drsyasu vivicya nityam...' This manifold world of our experience is anitya drsya - transient object of experience - constantly changing. In the midst of this anitya drsya, Swami Vivekananda was able to recognize the nityam, the eternal, with ease. There is something unchanging, luminous in the midst of this changeful world of inert matter. 'Tasmin samaadhata ihaasma lilayaa...' Not only did he recognize the Real in this whirlwind of the unreal, he also would merge himself in this Reality in deep Samadhi - all with the joyful ease of a child at play.

Diving deep into this non-dual intuition, what was Swamiji's unique philosophical discovery? His fundamental philosophical stance is reflected in many comments strewn across the Complete Works. He says that there are these two extremes - one says I shall retire into a Himalayan cave, ignore this world and plunge into nirvikalpa samadhi and give up the body. He has missed the way. There is the other who plunges headlong into the enjoyments and luxuries of the world. He too has missed the way. Two extremes -

one, ignoring the world, the many, and trying to find the One apart from the many. The other, taking this manifold world, the many, to be the sole reality and trying to find satisfaction contentment here, trying to make merry as long as life lasts. Swamiji holds that both these extremes have missed the way. Then what is the way? The way, Swamiji tells us, is '...the deification of the world. The Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of the Vedanta. But, at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification of the world -- giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us -- and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone...'

This was Swamiji's message and we can immediately see how it draws upon the Vedantic message reflected in the Isha Upanishad verse 1 'Ishaa vaasyam idam sarvam, yat kim ca jagatyaam jagat...' (All that you experience in the world is pervaded by the Lord or, more precisely, you have to pervade the world by the Lord- you have to recognize the divinity in all things and creatures of the world). There is an underlying reality which gives substance to the world as we experience it. This underlying reality is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss - the Upanishad says you have to recognize It. How does one go about recognizing It? Take an example - a river flowing by in front of you. So many waves, large and small, come up and merge back into the river. Each little wave is different from the others, but all the waves and indeed, the whole river, is water. Just as water pervades all these waves, as wood pervades wooden tables and chairs, and as gold pervades all golden ornaments, there is one Existence-Consciousness-Bliss that pervades all of us. Every existent being, living and non-living here is pervaded by One Reality. Realize it, recognize It.

That One Reality is your own true inner Self. Swami Vivekananda stressed this endless times, that you are Brahman, Tat tvam asi. That which you are within, is manifested as the world of your experience spread out before you in time and space.

Sister Nivedita caught this tune. In her introduction to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda she says '... the many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes ...It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion.' This is truly tremendous. The barrier between the spiritual and the secular is erased. Not that the spiritual has become secular. Rather, all that we consider secular is to be spiritualized. The whole of our life is to be spiritualized. This is the central teaching of Swami Vivekananda and one feels that humanity is still not in a position to accept the full implications of this teaching. We are still in the process of working out the implications of this profound insight.



Sister Nivedita goes on to propose that, because of this doctrine of the One and the many, Swami Vivekananda is the great preacher of karma, not divorced from, but as expressing jnana(knowledge) and bhakti (devotion). Jnana and bhakti are expressed through service. Swamiji taught Nivedita that art, science and religion are all expressing the same truth – he however added that this can be understood only through the non-dual vedanta .

What is spirituality after all? Swami Ranganathananda put it this way, 'Spirituality is when you close your eyes in meditation, you find peace within. When you open your eyes and see this world, you say, "What can I do for you?" ' Contrast this with worldliness. Closing his eyes, the worldly man, only finds turmoil and unhappiness within and opening his eyes, his attitude is 'I want this, I want that. What can I get from you?'

Facing Doubts

Such bold steps in theory (and practice) inevitably gave rise to doubts. Doubts were voiced during the lifetime of Swami Vivekananda – even now, there are doubts. Swami Vivekananda formed the Ramakrishna Mission to execute his plans. On that occasion Swami Yogananda said, 'Eshob tomaar videshi bhaaber kaaj hocchey! Paramahansa deber upadesh ki eirup chhilo?' (These are foreign ideas of work which you have taken up. Are these Paramahansa-deb's teachings?) He meant that all this work – schools, relief and so on – are foreign (western) ideas, not in accord with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda shot back, 'How much have you understood Sri Ramakrishna?' Sri Ramakrishna is much vaster than what you take him to be. Swami Yogananda agreed and acquiesced to Swami Vivekananda's interpretation. He said, 'I can clearly see that Thakur is doing all this through you.' Master mahashay, the author of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, had long standing doubts about what Swamiji was doing. Once he asked Swamiji, 'All these charitable works you have started for the welfare of the masses, all these are within Maya. Doesn't Advaita teach us that we have to overcome Maya through spiritual practices and attain mukti?' Swami Vivekananda replied with a smile, 'Your mukti is also within Maya, isn't it?' 'Nityo-mukto atmar mukti cheshta keno?' 'Why would you struggle to liberate the Self which you admit is ever liberated?' He is echoing here the Gaudapada's verse in the Mandukya Karika – Ultimately, there is neither anyone bound, and (therefore) none liberated (since liberation is freedom from bondage). Of course, Master mahashay kept quiet at that moment, but he was not fully convinced until much later. Years later, in the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Kashi, the Holy Mother saw the monks serving the poor patients in the hospital in the spirit of 'Shiva Jnane, Jiva Seva' – 'Service to living beings knowing them to be God' and she said with joyful approval, 'Thakur vicharan korchhen...aami dekchi ei shob tnar kaaj!' 'I feel the presence of Sri Ramakrishna here... all this service is His work!' Swami Brahmananda immediately asked a brahmachari to go and repeat Holy Mother's remarks to Master mahashay (who was also visiting the Sevashrama then). The brahmachari narrated everything to Master mahashay, who did not fail to understand the point, and laughed and said, 'Naa maanbaar to aar jo nei!' 'There is no way of denying it(the doctrine of service as spiritual practice) any longer!'

Even now there are doubts. There are scholars who find a discontinuity between the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the service activities started by Swami Vivekananda. They are not to be blamed for this – it is not easy to grasp the underlying continuity. Let us try to see this continuity for ourselves. If we look at Sri Ramakrishna's teachings there are certain teachings which he insistently repeated on different occasions. No doubt, when he met Vaishnavas he would talk of the love of Krishna and when he visited the Brahmos he would talk of the Formless. But there are certain things he made it a point to emphasize, albeit in his inimitably gentle and sweet manner. For example, 'Jaar nityo, taar i lila...', 'The changeless Absolute as well as the Divine Play of the changing manifold universe belong to One Reality' 'Je Sagun, tini Nirgun' 'The Personal God and the Impersonal Absolute are one and the same.' 'Kali aar Brahma ek' 'Kali and Brahman are the one and the same.'

He would often speak of the Vijnani. One climbs to the roof of a house, leaving the ground and the staircase behind and then sees that stairs and lower parts of the the house are made of the same materials – concrete and bricks and so on – as the roof itself. Similarly one attains the Absolute by the method of 'neti, neti' 'not this, not this' denying the relative world, and then realizes that the Absolute and the relative manifestation are one and the same. This is the Vijnani – he sees God in everythng.



Again, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Does God exist only when you meditate with closed eyes? Does He not also exist when you open your eyes?' Sri Ramakrishna would make it a point to give these teachings to all. And one can see a continuity in all of these teachings. It is in this light we must understand Swamiji when he says that the many and One are the same reality and that this is Sri Ramakrishna's teaching. '... and what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have done is to show that the many and the One are the same reality.' Once this continuity is established, we can proceed to throw the light of this understanding on the wide spectrum of Swami Vivekananda's teachings. Swamiji's talks and writings range over vast domains. There is perhaps no aspect of human life which he has not touched upon.

Implications

If One Brahman is manifesting as the many – jivas and jagat, then what would be the correlate of the identity of the non-dual Absolute in this manifold world? It can only be harmony. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Je samanvaya korechhey, sei lok.' 'He is truly a man who can harmonise everything.' Harmony is one of the practical implications of the metaphysical doctrine of the One and the many being one reality. Difference is a fact of experience. We are all different in so many respects – physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and so on. Are we then to obliterate difference? Far from it. The manifestation of the underlying Oneness would be harmony in daily life – harmony among people, harmony of religions, harmony of science and religion and so on. And all of these are the teachings of Swamiji. The harmony of religions particularly is of great relevance today in the 21st century. Swami taught the harmony of yogas – while recognizing that each of the four yogas – jnana, karma, bhakti and dhyana (knowledge, service, love and meditation respectively) – can individually lead to God realization, he recommends and even insists upon a harmony of the four yogas. He says that if one wants to follow Sri Ramakrishna truly one must have a harmony of the four yogas in his life. Swami Vivekananda speaks of the harmony of science and religion and expressed the hope that it may someday be achieved. He wanted the harmony of the East and the West – a wish he expressed on different occasions. He would have thoroughly approved of our efforts at multi-culturalism.

He spoke of harmonizing the major schools of Vedanta - Advaita, Visistadvaita and Dvaita. Swami Vivekananda's doctrine of the One and the many being the same reality provides a matrix in which you can situate all these versions of Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna would sometimes speak from the Dvaita point of view, sometimes from the Visistadvaita and again from the Advaita point of view. He clearly did not see them as adversaries. These are all true – God is different from the jiva under certain assumptions, the jiva is part of God with different assumptions and finally, it is valid to say that the jiva is identical with God. In Advaita, the consciousness within you is neither different from, nor part of, Brahman, but there exists identity, absolute oneness of jiva and Brahman. One is reminded of Hanuman's answer when he was asked what he (Hanuman) thought about Ramachandra. Hanuman replied 'Deha buddhya daso'ham; jiva buddhya tvad amsakam; Atma buddhya tu tvam eva aham – iti me niscita matih!' 'From the body aspect, I am Thy servant, as an individual jiva, I am part of Thee and, as the Atman, Thou art verily I – this is my conviction!' Here Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita are harmonized beautifully. The doctrine of One and the many gives a philosophical approach towards generating these different approaches to the Vedantic truth.

In any discussion of Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta, the term 'Practical Vedanta' will always crop up. In what ways is Vedanta practical? How is Vedanta philosophically linked to the service of the poor, the sick, the ignorant? Swami Gambhirananda gives us a clear and striking analysis in his writings. The question is, after realizing the One, Brahman, how does the perfected saint, the jivanmukta, view the many, the jivas and jagat? He says, there may be three distinct attitudes a jivanmukta can have towards the many. First, he may remain immersed in the One Absolute and completely ignore the manifestation. We recall how initially Narendranath, after attaining nirvikalpa Samadhi, said he preferred to remain in that state. Of course, Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him but the point here is that it is a valid attitude for a jivanmukta. The second attitude is that he may see this world of the many as a wonder, as the play of Maya. And there is a third attitude where the jivanmukta sees God in all these forms and melts in love and compassion. This third attitude is what Swamiji is talking about when he links Vedanta to service.

What is true of the jivanmukta is also true for the rest of us. In his commentary on the second chapter

of the Gita Sankaracharya says ‘sarvatra hi adhyatma sastre, yani eva kritarthasya laksanani, tani eve sadhakasya sadhanani, yatna sadhyatvat...’ ‘In all scriptures, all that is said to be the natural characteristics of the perfected, are the very qualities are to be practiced by spiritual aspirants, since such perfection is attained by effort.’

People did not understand this. When Akhandananda Maharaj wrote to Pramadas babu about the orphanage in Sargachhi, Murshidabad, Pramadas babu replied from Benares, ‘For sannyasis its better to remain immersed in spiritual practice and beg for food and not get distracted by such work...’ Akhandanandaji wrote back in a fiery letter, ‘I know my Lord is always with me. My Lord is my own. That very God who is within me is telling me, “It is among human beings that rishis and munis have come, it is within human beings that even Avatars have come – and can’t you see what a terrible state have these very human beings been reduced to?” This is what the Lord is telling me. I sacrifice this life for humanity and how many more lives I shall lay down for them, I do not know...’

Similarly all the different teachings of Swamiji can be seen in the light of this doctrine of the One and the many. Take Swami Vivekananda’s definition of religion as the manifestation of the divinity already within man. Why ‘manifestation’ of the divinity within? Why not just knowledge of the inner divinity, or simply realization of the divinity within? If One and many are the same reality, then it follows inevitably that the realization of the One should be manifested in this world of the many.

Swamiji said, ‘My mission in this world can be put in a few words – to preach unto mankind their inner divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.’ Notice the emphasis on the manifestation of spiritual realization. This was the attitude of Sri Ramakrishna himself, the teaching of the avatara of this age. Religion is not only a matter of inner realization, but it must also be reflected in life. Again, when Swami Vivekananda gave an ideal for the new monastic order, it was ‘Atmano Moksartham, Jagat Hitaya Cha’ ‘For one’s own liberation, and for the welfare of the world.’ The welfare of the world is not a by-product of spirituality. It is not something peripheral added unto the primary aim of spiritual liberation. Rather, if One and the many be the same reality, it follows directly that as you do sadhana for your own liberation, you must also serve all.

The doctrine of the One and the many being the same reality is then, the philosophical core of the vast and varied treasury of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings and indeed, of his life. Sometimes he is immersed in nirvikalpa samadhi, and again he works tirelessly for the welfare of humanity - the unifying theme in this life of polar extremes seems to be this doctrine.

Vedantic Foundation of Values

1. Morality is an expression of what is already intrinsic to the One reality within us, while immorality is caused by ignorance of our own true nature. Ethics is thus grounded in the ontology of the self. The importance of this move has not yet been widely appreciated by philosophers. It follows directly that ethics is based on freedom and not compulsion. When I am ethical, I am merely expressing my own true nature, freed from considerations of utility or duty.
2. Swami Vivekananda gave us a startlingly simple test of morality ‘That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.’ Altruism is thus equated to morality and altruism is grounded in the Vedantic unity of all existence. What we call love springs from the same source – this Vedantic unity. Love is expressed as service to all irrespective of race, nationality, religion, gender or caste.
3. The Vedantic principles of the unity of all existence and the innate divine nature of all beings also serves as the ground for justifying equality inspite of apparent differences, and as the basis for eradicating privilege and working for equity.

Vivekananda, Swami. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, Volume 8 page 261

Ibid. Vol. 2 page 146

Ibid. Vol 1 page xv (Introduction to the Complete Works)





Unity in Diversity

David Russell

Trustee, Congregation of Jacob Synagogue in Stepney, London

In Swami Vivekananda's speech on Unity in Diversity, delivered in London in 1896, he said:

"Be a master of yourself, stand up and be free, go beyond the pale. First find out that you are not the slave of nature, never were and never will be; that this nature, infinite as you may think it, is only finite, a drop in the ocean, and your Soul is the ocean; you are beyond the stars, the sun, and the moon. That is what the Vedanta teaches. It lays no responsibility on little gods; for you are the makers of your own fortunes. See the one and be free."

It is a view shared by Judaism. As Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Auschwitz, an inspirational psychologist said: "Being human beings means being conscious and being responsible." Whether we use or abuse our responsibility is critical to our shared future. It is particularly apt today as the climate change movement gathers ever more momentum, recognising our responsibility to our world, and each other.

The Vivekananda Human Centre Unity exemplifies this value of Unity in Diversity, over the 25 years of its work to date. As we celebrate together this landmark anniversary, the message of Swami Vivekananda is vital if we are to build a strong community necessary to combat climate change and repair the division of Brexit. We are living in a time when society is becoming ever more multicultural. Respecting diversity is more important than ever. It is a responsibility that we share, whatever our belief, age, background and it should be seen, as Vivekananda teaches us, as an opportunity, not just a challenge.

For centuries now, Britain has been home to immigrant communities. Many people make their ways to our shores to escape persecution, such as my own Jewish family who settled here, leaving behind the antisemitism rife in Eastern Europe and Russia at the turn of last century.

Britain has led the world in always providing asylum for those that sought it. It is a tradition, particularly in today's climate, for which we should be proud. It is a history that has made Britain the melting pot that it is today. It is a responsibility to open up our homes, our shores, for those in need – as Abraham first demonstrated us.

But despite, or some claim because of the diversity, these are tense times. That is the challenge at the heart of our community of communities, and the work of the Vivekananda Human Centre. Never before have we lived so closely with so many people whose cultures and beliefs are so different from our own. However, it is this unity in diversity that makes Britain so special.

We must learn to celebrate diversity, our differences. We have a responsibility to celebrate diversity, our differences. Because each of us and our communities are unique means that we all have a distinctive contribution to make. Each of us has something that someone else lacks, and each of us lacks something that someone else has.

We have a responsibility to talk to, listen to and learn about each other. On that basis we can learn to more than tolerate each other, but respect each other. That is why it is so heartening that today's event is an interfaith event. By sharing our different cultures, we can perceive our commonality and our shared responsibility.

In September 2019, the UN Secretary General will convene a Climate Summit to bring world leaders of governments, the private sector and civil society together to increase and accelerate climate action and ambition. As diverse young people from across the world unite to take an ever-increasing lead in



campaigning for greater action, it is important to bear in mind the words of the Earth Charter, written at the beginning of this millennium:

“We require a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. Our cultural diversity is a precious heritage and different cultures will find their own distinctive ways to realize the vision. We must deepen and expand the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, for we have much to learn from the ongoing collaborative search for truth and wisdom.”

By doing so, I hope as Swamiji concludes...

“A time must come when the harmony of Oneness will pervade the whole world. We are all struggling towards that one end through our jealousies and hatreds, through our love and co-operation. A tremendous stream is flowing towards the ocean carrying us all along with it; and though like straws and scraps of paper we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss.”

May our different streams soon lead to that Ocean on oneness...

----- X -----

The Ultimate Reality can be realized through various paths taught in world religions. All religions are true in so far as they lead to the same ultimate Goal.

-Sri Ramakrishna

Through spiritual disciplines the ties of past karma are cut asunder. But the realization of God cannot be achieved without ecstatic love for him.

-Holy Mother

If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, ... and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.

-Swami Vivekananda



HOMAGE

to



Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj

The 12th President of Ramakrishna Order

His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. He was very dear to all who came in contact with him.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj



Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj

The 13th President of Ramakrishna Order

His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. He was very dear to all who came in contact with him.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj



Revered Swami Gahanandaji Maharaj

The 14th President of Ramakrishna Order

His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. He was very dear to all who came in contact with him. He came to visit the UK and delivered his message at the 150th Birthday Celebration of Holy Mother in London.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Gahanandaji Maharaj.



Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj

The 15th President of Ramakrishna Order

His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. He was very dear to all who came and contact with him. Every year he used to give a message to Vivekananda Centre. His message always encourages to the people. We will miss him always special when we will organise a landmark festival like the Vivekananda festival.

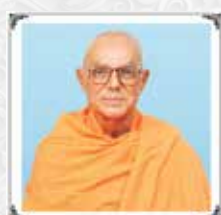
We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj.



Revered Swami Aksharanandaji Maharaj

The Vivekananda Human Centre was established in the UK in 1994, inspired by Revered Swami Aksharanandaji Maharaj. His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. We miss him so much, especially when we organise any festival, more so when we organise a landmark festival like the Vivekananda festival. He was very dear to all of us who knew him. He came to visit the UK twice and each time delivered his message at the Vivekananda Festival in London.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Aksharanandaji Maharaj.



Revered Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj

His blessings and inspiration will always be the guide for the Vivekananda Human Centre. He was very dear to all who came in contact with him. He wrote the letter which introduced Ram Chandra Saha for the first time to Swami Dayatmananda. He came to visit the UK couple of time and delivered his message at the Vivekananda festival in London. We miss him so much, especially when we Visit Belur Math.

We offer our heartfelt gratitude and homage to the sweet memory of Revered Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj.

Vivekananda Human Centre, London has invited following
Revered Maharaj from Ramakrishna Order for last 25 years.
We are ever grateful to all Revered Maharajs



Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj

14th President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2004)



Revered Swami Smaranandaji Maharaj

16th President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2001 & 2002)



Revered Swami Akshranandaji Maharaj

Former Head of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission

Dhaka (visited in 1998 & 2006)



Revered Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj

Former Vice-President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2004 & 2007)



Revered Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj

Vice- President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2006)



Revered Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj

Vice- President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2013 & 2017)



Revered Swami Suviranandaji Maharaj

General Secretary

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2016)



Revered Swami Girishananda

Trustee

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission and Manager, Belur Math, India (visited in 2015)

**Revered Swami Bodhasananda**

[Assistant Secretary](#)

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission and Manager, Belur Math, India
(visited in 2018)

**Revered Swami Chatanananda**

[President, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA](#)

USA (visited in 2015 & 2017)

**Revered Swami Prubhudananda**

[Minister-in-charge Vedanta Society of Sacramento](#)

USA (visited in 1999)

**Revered Swami Bhaskarananda**

[The present Swami in charge of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington](#)

USA (visited in 2001)

**Revered Swami Ameyananda**

[Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission](#)

Dhaka (visited in 2013)

**Revered Swami Gokulananda**

[Former Secretary](#)

Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi (visited in 1998)

**Revered Swami Dayatmananda**

[Former President](#)

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK (visited many times from 1994 to 2018)

**Revered Swami Amarananda**

[President](#)

Centre Vedantique, Switzerland (visited many times from 1994 to 2018)

**Revered Swami Veetamohananda**

[President](#)

Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, France (visited many times from 1994 to 2018)

**Revered Swami Purnatmananda**

Secretary

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission Dhaka (visited in 2013)

**Revered Swami Baneshananda**

President

Vedanta Gesellschaft, Germany (visited in 2008 & 2016)

**Revered Swami Kripamayananda**

President

Vedanta Society of Toronto, Canada (visited in 2015)

**Revered Swami Savolokananda**

Secretary

Ramakrishna Mission, Narendrapur, India (visited in 2016)

**Revered Swami Ishatmanandaji Maharaj**

Vivekananda Vedanta Centre, Chicago

USA (visited in 2016)

**Revered Swami Tripurananda**

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre

UK (visited in 2018)

**Swami Atmapriyananda**

Vice Chancellor

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, India (visited in 2018)

**Revered Swami Sarvastananda**

President

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK (visited from 2018 to continue..)

**Swami Nirmalatmananda**

The Head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre

Brazil (visited in 1999)

**Revered Swami Sthiratmananda***Secretary*

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Chandpur (visited in 2006 & 2013)

**Revered Swami Tattwasarananda**

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India (visited in 2017)

**Revered Swami Atmanishthananda**

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math (visited in 2004)

**Revered Swami Jnanavratanaanda**

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math (visited in 2002)

**Revered Swami Shubhakananda**

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math (visited in 2016)

**Revered Swami Durganathananda**

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math (visited in 2007)

God dwells in all people but the manifestation of this inner Divinity varies from person to person. In saintly people there is greater manifestation of God. Women are special manifestations of Divine Mother of the Universe, and so are to be treated with respect.

-Swami Vivekananda

Charitable Works 2019

Vivekananda Human Centre, London Distributed Vivekananda Scholarship on Swamiji's Birthday, 12 January 2019 to the underprivileged students at Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka. Scholarship distributed by Revered Swami Suviranandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, India.



Vivekananda Human Centre, London also distributed Vivekananda Scholarship to the students at Mayer Bari, Bagbazar, Kolkata, India. Scholarship distributed by Revered Swami Nityamuktanandaji Maharaj, Secretary, Ramakrishna Math, Bagbazar, Kolkata, India.



Charitable Works 2019

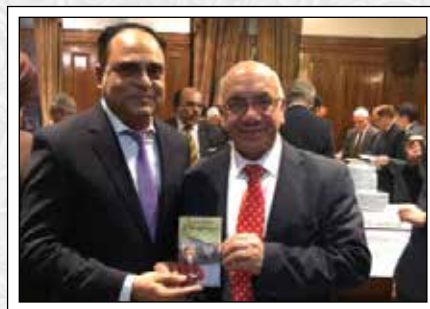
Vivekananda Human Centre London distributed winter clothes to the 250 Underprivileged students of Shishu Vikash Sanstha, at Somsar Sri Ramakrishna Seva Mandir (Birth place of Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj) Bankura, West Bengal, India. Clothes distributed by Revered Swami Jyotirupananda, Prisedent, Ramakrishna Society Vedanta Centre, Moscow, Russia.



Food distribution to the homeless people in London on the occasion of Swamiji's Birthday 2019



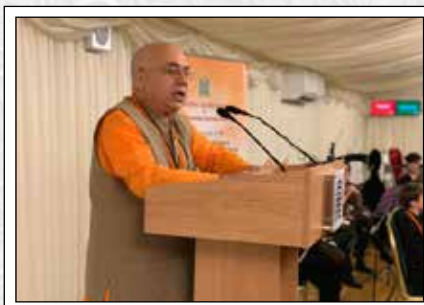
**Distributed Swamiji's Books at India House, London on the eve of
Swamiji's Birthday 2019**



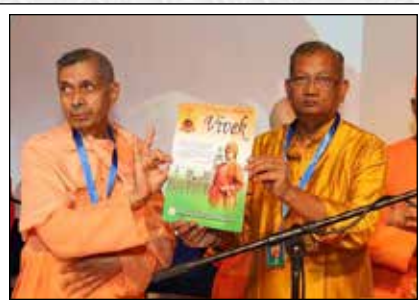
**Vivekananda Human Centre, London, distributed education material among
the 135 students of the coaching centre of Sahapur Sri Ramakrishna
Vivekananda Seva Sangha, Burdwan, west Bengal, India.**



We are delighted to inform all that we have celebrated 125th Anniversary of Swamiji's Chicago Addresses successfully at the House of Commons, and The British Parliament acknowledges the work of Swami Vivekananda and his message through Early Day Motions (EDMs) 1834. Vivekananda Human Centre celebrated 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic Chicago Addresses at House of Commons London on 15 November 2018.



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but they alone live who live for others, the rest
are more dead than alive."

– Swami Vivekananda

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