Teachings of Swami Vivekananda on Practical Vedanta

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We all know that Swami Vivekananda was a great social reformer. He has given a new theory of ethics and new principle of morality based on Hindu philosophy and religion. The deepest influence upon his thought is obviously of ancient Hindu Philosophy—especially of the Vedanta. Along with this, he also carried, on his thought the influence of Christianity. Vivekananda takes up the ideal of service and love from Christianity. His speech at the world's parliament of Religion held in September 1893 made him famous as an 'Orator of Devine right' and a Messenger of Indian Wisdom to the Western World. In November 1896 Swamiji delivered a series of four lectures in London on practical Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda was deeply moved to see the poverty and backwardness of the masses. He was first religious leader in India to understand and openly declare that the real cause of India's downfall was the neglect of the masses. It was first of all necessary to infuse into their minds faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense. Swamiji found this message in the principle of the Atman, the doctrine of the potential divinity of the soul, taught in Vedanta. Vedanta is intensely practical and "Thou art That" is the essence of Vedanta.

The soul was never born and will never die, and all these ideas that we are going to die and are afraid to die are mere superstitions. And all such ideas as that we can do this or cannot do that are superstitions. We can do everything. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. Know that there is no darkness around us. Take the hands away and there is the light which was from the beginning. Darkness never existed, weakness never existed. We who are fools cry that we are weak; we who are fools cry that we are impure. Thus Vedanta not only insists that the ideal is practical, but that it has been so all the time; and this Ideal, this Reality, is our own nature. The Vedanta recognizes no sin, it only recognizes error. And the greatest error says the Vedanta, is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner, a miserable creature, No man becomes purer and purer, it is a matter of greater manifestation. The one central ideal of Vedanta is this oneness. There are no two in anything, no two lives, nor even two different kinds of life for the two worlds. You will find the Vedas speaking of heavens and things like that at first; but later on, when they come to the highest ideals of their philosophy, they brush away all these things. There is but one life, one world, one existence. Everything is that One, the difference is in degree and in kind. The difference between weakness and strength is one of degree; the difference between virtue and vice is one of degree, the difference between heaven and hell is one of degree, the difference between life and death is one of degree, all differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything. All is One, which manifests itself, either as thought, or life, or soul, or body, and the difference is only in degree. Dragging down and condemning is not the way to work.

There may be weakness, says the Vedanta, but never mind, we want to grow. As thinking all the time that we are diseased will not cure us — medicine is necessary, so also strength does not come by thinking of weakness all the time. We may forget anything outside, we may try to become hypocrites to the external world, but in our heart of hearts we all know our weaknesses. But, says the Vedanta, being reminded of weakness does not help much; give strength. The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength.

Vedanta says, "You are pure and perfect, and what you call sin does not belong to you." Sins are very low degrees of Self-manifestation; manifest your Self in a high degree. You can do anything and everything, you are almighty.

Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had

been more extensively taught and practiced, the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Faith in ourselves will do everything. The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourselves means love for all. Hear day and night that you are that Soul. Repeat it to yourselves day and night till it enters into your very veins, till it tingles in every drop of blood, till it is in your flesh and bone. Let the whole body be full of that one ideal, "I am the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent, ever-glorious Soul." Meditate upon it, and out of that will come work. Fill yourselves with the ideal; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of the thought.

Never tell yourselves or others that you are weak. Do good if you can, but do not injure the world. There is only one life and one world, and this one life and one world is appearing to us as manifold. This manifoldness is like a dream. When you dream, one dream passes away and another comes. You do not live in your dreams. The dreams come one after another before you. So it is in this world of ninety per cent misery and ten per cent happiness. Perhaps after a while it will appear as ninety per cent happiness, and we shall call it heaven, but a time comes to the sage when the whole thing vanishes, and this world appears as God Himself, and his own soul as God. It is not therefore that there are many worlds. All this manifoldness is the manifestation of that One. That One is manifesting Himself as many, as matter, spirit, mind, thought, and everything else.

One of the most significant contributions of Swami Vivekananda to the modern world is his interpretation of religion as a universal experience of transcendental Reality. Swamiji met the challenge of modern science showing that religion is as scientific as science itself. Religion is the 'science of consciousness'. As such science and religion are not contradictory to each other but are complementary. This universal conception frees religion from the hold of superstitions, dogmatism, priest craft and intolerance, and makes religion the highest and noblest pursuit.

Religion is ever a practical science. It is practiced first, and knowledge afterwards. God is Personal and Impersonal at the same time. And Man, the Infinite, Impersonal Man, is manifesting Himself as person. We the infinite have limited ourselves, as it were, into small parts. The Vedanta says that Infinity is our true nature; it will never vanish, it will abide forever. But we are limiting ourselves by our Karma, which like a chain round our necks has dragged us into this limitation. Break that chain and be free and then have any number of personalities you like. Then we will play like the actor who comes upon the stage and plays the part of a beggar. Contrast him with the actual beggar walking in the streets. The scene is, perhaps, the same in both cases, the words are, perhaps, the same, but yet what difference! The one enjoys his beggary while the other is suffering misery from it. Here the difference is, the one is free and the other is bound. The actor knows his beggary is not true, but that he has assumed it for play, while the real beggar thinks that it is his too familiar state and that he has to bear it whether he wills it or not.

Bible says, "If you cannot love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen?"

We have found God eternally. We have been living in Him eternally; everywhere He is eternally known, eternally worshipped. Those who worship God through ceremonials and forms, however crude we may think them to be, are not in error. It is the journey from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. Darkness is less light; evil is less good; impurity is less purity. It must always be born in mind that we should see others with eyes of love, with sympathy, knowing that they are going along the same path that we have trodden.

- Swamiji has taught Indians how to master Western science and technology and at the same time develop spiritually. He has also taught Indians how to adapt Western humanism especially the ideas of individual freedom, social equality justice and respect for women to Indian ethos.
- Swamiji teaches, whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, you will be weak, if you think yourselves strong, you will be strong.

- If you have faith in all the three hundred thirty millions of your mythological Gods, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves and standup on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.
- Strength is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrows have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery.
- Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success.
- Religion is realization, not talk, not 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.
- Swamiji asks to teach ourselves and 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.
- They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive. This is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others.
- It is love and love alone that Swamiji preach, and his teaching is based on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the soul of the universe.

The time has come when we have to think about our moral values and from the very beginning we have to teach younger about their strength and intrinsic purity because purity is our real nature, our true divine self or Atman. Similarly, we should love or serve our neighbours because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit known as Paramatman or Brahman.

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