

## THE ESSENCE OF THE GITA

- ◇ The soul is immortal. It does not take birth. Nor does it die. Nobody can kill you. Then why feel worried? or fear anybody?
- ◇ Whatever happened in the past was for the good. Whatever is happening now is also for the good. Whatever will happen in the future will be for the good too. Hence, do not repent over the past. Do not worry for the future, just think of the present that is in progress.
- ◇ What have you lost for which you weep. What is there that you brought with you but have now lost? What is there that you produced but has now perished? You did not bring anything to this world. Whatever you have, you had it only here. Whatever you have given, you have given it only here. Whatever you have taken, it is from him, the Almighty. Whatever you rendered, it was rendered unto him. Empty-handed you came and empty-handed will you go. Whatever is yours today was somebody else's yesterday and will be somebody else's tomorrow. You take delight in the illusion that it belongs to you. Alas, this illusory happiness is at the root of all your suffering.
- ◇ Change is the law of the universe. What you deem as death is, in reality, life. A moment can turn you into a millionaire; another can reduce you to a pauper. Free your mind from such thoughts as 'this is mine—this yours', 'this is—this petty' and the shackles that hold you captive will "collapse. Then everything will belong to you, and you to everyone.
- ◇ Neither you belong to the body, nor does the body belong to you. The body is constituted by the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and vacuum. After death, it disintegrates and returns to these elements. The soul, however, is eternal and unchangeable. What are you, the soul or the body?
- ◇ Surrender yourself to the will of God. He is the best anchor. He who knows about this anchor gets liberated from fear, anxiety and sorrow forever. [Dedicate all your actions to God. It will enable you to experience the happiness of a truly liberated one.]  
—Lord Krishna

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**Arise, Awake and Stop Not...**  
(Swami Vivekananda's Clarion Call)

By  
Swami Vidyananda Saraswati



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## PREFACE

The present work has grown out of vital urges and under pressure of peculiar situation obtaining today. Never was the need greater than today to make the youth of our country conscious of the moral and spiritual heritage of our great seers and sages. This book is a step in this direction.

There has never been a period in her national life when India was lacking in spiritual giants, capable of moving the world. Swami Vivekananda was one of those intellectuals who formed the galaxy of such giants towards the end of the nineteenth century. A great teacher with international message, he was one of the most powerful cultural delegations or ambassadors to the West and a source of strength and inspiration to the youth of India. The treatise embodies, within a short compass, the essentials of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

The author claims no originality either in content or in expression. He takes this opportunity for gratefully acknowledging to the various sources from which he has copiously drawn.

– (Swami) Vidyananda Saraswati

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## Narendranath Datta

Narendranath Datta, calling him, for short, Narendra, or more endearingly, Naren first saw the light of the day on Monday, January 12, 1863. While travelling in India Narendranath often changed his name to avoid recognition. He assumed the name of Vivekananda at the request of his disciple the Raja of Khetri, sometime in 1891-92. It was Vivekananda, loved and revered in the East and the West alike as the rejuvenator of Hinduism in India and the messenger of its eternal truths abroad.

Narendra grew up to be a sweet, sunny-tempered, but very restless boy. Two nurses were necessary to keep his exuberant energy under control. Naren felt a child's love for birds and animals, and this characteristic reappeared during the last days of his life. Among his boyhood pets were a family cow, a monkey, a goat, a peacock and several pigeons.

Narendra's future personality was influenced by his gifted father and his saintly mother, both of whom kept a chastening eye upon him. The father had his own manner of discipline and the mother her own. The mother has played her part in bringing out Narendra's innate virtues. When he told her one day, of having been unjustly treated in the school she said to him in consolation: "My child, what does it matter, if you are in the right? Always follow the truth without caring about the result. Very often you may have to suffer injustice or unpleasant consequences for holding to the truth; but you must not, under any circumstances, abandon it." Many years later Narendranath proudly said to an audience, "I am indebted to my mother for whatever knowledge I have acquired."

But Narendra bore a striking resemblance to his grandfather who had renounced the world to lead a monastic life, and many thought that the latter had been

reborn in him. The youngster developed a special fancy for wandering monks, whose very sight would greatly excite him. It is truly said that coming events cast their shadows before. One day when a monk appeared at the door and asked for aims, Narendra gave him his only possession, the tiny piece of new cloth that was wrapped round his waist. Thereafter, whenever a monk was seen in the neighbourhood, Narendra would be locked in a room. But even then he would throw out of the window whatever he found near at hand as an offering to the holy man.

During his childhood Narendra, like many other Hindu children of his age, developed a love for the Hindu deities of whom he had learnt from his mother. Particularly attracted by the heroic story of Rama and his-faithful consort Sita, he procured their images, bedecked them with flowers and worshipped them in his boyish manner. But disillusionment came when he heard someone denounce marriage vehemently as a terrible bondage. He discarded Rama and Sita as unworthy of worship. In their place he installed the image of Shiva, little knowing then that he too had his consort, Parvati, with two sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya. Nevertheless, he retained a fondness for the Ramayana.

Narendra was marked from birth to be a leader of men, as his very name Narendra (lord of men) signified. Little wonder then that he was the undisputed leader at school. When playing his favourite game of 'King and the Court', he would assume the role of the monarch and assign to his friends the roles of the ministers, commander-in-chief and other State officials. On the other hand, even at that early age he questioned why one human being should be considered superior to another. In his father's office separate tobacco pipes (hookkas) were provided for clients belonging to different castes and the pipe from which the Moslems smoked was set quite apart. Narendra once smoked from all the pipes, including the one marked for



the Moslems and when reprimanded, remarked, “I cannot see what difference should it make.”

As Narendra grew into adolescence, his temperament showed a marked change. He became keen about intellectual matters, read serious books on history and literature, devoured newspapers and attended public meetings. Music was his favourite pastime. He insisted that it should express a lofty idea and arouse the feelings of the musician.

At Raipur Narendra was encouraged by his father to meet notable scholars and discuss with them various intellectual topics usually considered too obtruse for boys of his age. On such occasions he exhibited great mental power. Narendra had learnt from his father the art of grasping the essentials of things, seeing truth from the widest and most comprehensive standpoints, and holding to the real issue under discussion. In college Narendra, now a handsome youth, muscular and agile, though slightly inclined to stoutness, enjoyed serious studies. During the first two years he studied Western logic. Thereafter, he specialised in Western philosophy and the ancient and modern history of the different European nations. His memory was prodigious. It took him only three days to assimilate Green’s History of the English people. About this time he came into contact with Shri Ramakrishna. This event was to become the major turning point of his life. As a result of his association with Ramakrishna, his innate spiritual yearning was stirred up and he began to feel the transitoriness of the world and the futility of academic education. The day before his B.A. examination, he suddenly felt an all-consuming love for God and, standing before the room of a college-mate, was heard singing with great feeling—

Sing Ye, O mountains, O clouds, O great winds!

Sing Ye, Sing ye, Sing His glory!

Sing with joy, all ye suns and moons and stars!

Sing Ye, Sing Ye, His glory

The introduction of English education in India following the British conquest of the country brought Hindu Society into contact with the intellectual and aggressive European culture. The Hindu Youths who came under the spell of the new, dynamic way of life realised the many shortcomings of their own society. Under the Muslim rule, even before the coming of the British, the dynamic aspect of the Hindu culture had been suppressed and the caste system stratified. The priests controlled the religious life of the people for their own selfish ends. Meaningless dogmas and lifeless ceremonies supplanted the invigorating philosophic teachings of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita.

The Brahma Samaj captured the imagination of the educated youths of Bengal. Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1774-1833), the founder of this religious organisation, broke away from the rituals, image-worship and priest craft of orthodox Hinduism and exhorted his followers to dedicate themselves to the worship and adoration of the Eternal, and the Immutable Being, who is the Creator and the Preserver of the Universe. The Raja, endowed with a gigantic intellect, studied the Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist scriptures and was the first Indian to realise the importance of the Western rational method for solving the diverse problems of Hindu society. The Brahma Sama discarded many of the conventions of Hinduism, such as rituals and the worship of God through images. Primarily a reformist movement, it directed its main energy to the emancipation of women, remarriage of Hindu widows, abolition of child marriage and the spread of mass education. Influenced by Western culture, the Brahma Samaj upheld the supremacy of reason and preached against the acceptance of scriptural authority. The whole movement was intellectual and eclectic in character. Unlike traditional Hinduism it had no roots in the spiritual experiences of saints and seers. Brahma Samaj as such could not satisfy the deep spiritual yearning of Narendra's soul.

Narendra was convinced that the country's fall was not caused by religion. On the contrary, as long as India had clung to her religious ideals, the country had overflowed with material prosperity. But the enjoyment of power for a long time had corrupted the priests. The people at large were debarred from true knowledge of religion and the Vedas, the source of Hindu culture, were completely forgotten. The caste-system (Varnashram) which had originally been devised to emphasise the organic unity of Hindu society was now petrified. Its real purpose had been to protect the weak from the ruthless competition of the strong and to vindicate the supremacy of spiritual knowledge over the power of military weapons, wealth and organised labour. But it was now sapping the vitality of the masses. Narendra wanted to throw open the man-making wisdom of the Vedas to all, and thus, bring about the regeneration of his motherland. He, therefore, encouraged his brothers at the Baranagore monastery to study the grammar of Panini without which one could not acquire first-hand knowledge of the Vedas.

Narendar had seen northern India, the Aryavarta, the sacred land of the Aryans, where the sacred culture of India had originated and developed. He clearly saw to what an extent the educated Hindus had come under the spell of the materialistic ideas of the West. He despised sterile imitation. He began also to feel the inner agony of the outwardly happy people of the West, whose spiritual vitality was being undermined by the mechanistic and materialistic conception of life encouraged by the sudden development of the physical sciences. He felt that Europe was sitting on the edge of a smouldering volcano, and any moment Western culture might be shattered by its fiery eruption. The suffering of man, whether in the East or in the West, hurt his tender soul. The whole world now seemed to beckon him to work.

During his wanderings he both learnt and taught. He asked the Hindus to go back to the eternal truths of their religion, hear the message of the Vedas and Upanishads, respect temples and religious symbols and take pride in their birth in the holy land of India. He wanted them to avoid both the outmoded orthodoxy still advocated by fanatical leaders and the misguided rationalism of the westernised reformers. But he advocated animal food for the Hindus if they were to cope at all with the rest of the world in the present reign of power and find a place among the great nations of the world. He insisted upon the idea even though it was not compatible with the teachings of Hindu scriptures. Bengali, as he was, it was his weakness.

As Alexander Pope put it—

Virtuous and vicious every man must be,  
Few in the extreme but all in degree.

Swami Vivekananda discussed with the Maharaja of Mysore his plan of going to America, but when the latter came forward with an offer to pay for his expenses for the trip, he declined to take a final decision before visiting Rameshwaram. When pressed by the Maharaja and the Prime Minister to accept some gifts, the Swami took a tobacco pipe from the one and a cigar from the other.

One day Swamiji was sharing a railway compartment with two Englishmen, who took him for an illiterate beggar and began to crack jokes in English at his expense. At the next station they were astonished to hear him talking with the station master in perfect English. Embarrassed, they asked him why he had not protested against their rude words. With a smile, the Swami replied, “This is not the first time that I have seen fools.” The English men became angry and wanted a fight. But looking at the Swami’s strong body, they thought that discretion was the better part of valour, and apologised.

Suddenly a heroic thought entered his mind: He must approach the outside world and appeal to its conscience.

He wanted to tell the West that the health of India was the concern of the whole world. The world needed India: her knowledge of the soul and of God, her spiritual heritage, her genuine freedom through detachment and renunciation. It needed these in order to extricate itself from the sharp claws of the monster of materialism.

He saw America as a country of unlimited opportunities where people's minds were free from the encumbrance of castes and classes. There flashed before his mind a land of optimism, great wealth and unlimited generosity. He would give the receptive Americans the ancient wisdom of India and bring back to his motherland, in exchange, the knowledge of science and technology. If he succeeded in his mission to America, he would not only enhance India's prestige in the Occident, but create a new confidence among his own people. He recalled the earnest requests of his friends to represent India in the forthcoming Parliament of Religions in Chicago. And in particular, he remembered the words of the friends in Kathiawar (now Saurashtra) who had been the first to encourage him to go to the West: "Go and take it by storm, and then return."

Vivekananda's fame had already spread to the premier city of South India, and he was warmly greeted by a group of enthusiastic youngmen. In Madras he publicly announced his intention of going to America. His devotees there collected funds for the trip, and it was through them that he later started his mission in India in an organised form. In Madras, therefore, he poured his heart and soul into discussion on religion, philosophy, science, literature and history. To a scofter he said: "How dare you criticise your venerable forefathers in such a fashion? A little learning has muddled your brain. Have you tested the wisdom of the Rishis? Have you even as much read the Vedas? There is a challenge thrown by the Rishis. If you dare oppose them, take it up."

He would blaze up at people who, for lack of time, did not practise meditation. "What"! he thundered at a listener.

Those giants of old, the ancient Rishis who never walked but strode, standing by whose side you would shrivel into a moth—they, sir, had time for meditation and devotion, and you have none”.

The Swami arrived in Bombay accompanied by the private secretary to the Raja of Khetri who had earlier bestowed upon him the name by which he was to become famous and which was destined to raise India in the estimation of the world. The same Raja provided him with a robe of orange silk, an ochre turban, a handsome purse, and a first class ticket on the ‘S.S. Peninsular’ of the Peninsular and Orient Company, which was to sail on May 31, 1893. On reaching Chicago, he wrote to a friend on August 20, 1893—“I am here amongst the children of the Son of Mary, and the Lord Jesus will help me.”

## Swami Vivekananda

The Parliament of Religions was an adjunct of the World's Columbian Exposition, which had been primarily organised to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492. One of the main goals of this Exposition was to disseminate knowledge of the progress, and enlightenment brought about in the world by Western savants, especially through science and technology. Since religion formed a vital factor in human culture, it had been decided to organise this great meeting in conjunction with the Exposition.

Maybe, some of the more enthusiastic Christian theologians, among the promoters of the Parliament, thought that the Parliament would give them an opportunity to prove the superiority of Christianity, professed by the vast majority of the people of the progressive West over the other faiths of the world. Much later, Swami Vivekananda said, in one of his jocular moods, that the Lord willed the Parliament in order to give him an opportunity to present the eternal religion of the Hindus before the world at large and that the stage was set for him to play his important role, everything else being incidental. The appropriateness of this remark maybe appreciated now, hundred years after the great event, from the fact that whereas all else that was said and discussed at the Parliament has been forgotten, what Vivekananda preached is still cherished there and the movement inaugurated by him has endeared itself to American hearts.

At 10 A.M. on Monday, September 11, 1893, the Parliament opened its deliberations with due solemnity. The spacious hall and the huge gallery of the Art Palace were packed with seven thousand people, men and women,

representing the culture of the United States. The official delegates marched in a great procession to the platform. In the centre sat, in his scarlet robe, Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of the Catholic Church in the Western hemisphere. He occupied a chair of State. On his left and right were grouped the Oriental delegates: Pratap Chandra Mazumdar of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj, and Nagarkar of Bombay; Dharmapal representing Ceylon Buddhists; Chakravarti and Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society. With them sat Swami Vivekananda, who represented no particular sect, but the Universal Religion of the Vedas and who spoke for the religious aspiration of all humanity. His gorgeous robe, large yellow turban, bronze complexion and flue features stood out prominently on the platform and drew everybody's attention.

Cardinal Gibbons opened the meeting with a prayer. The delegates arose, one by one, and read prepared speeches, but the Hindu Sanyasi was totally unprepared. He had never before addressed such an assembly. When he was asked to give his message he was seized with stage fright, and requested the Chair to call on him a little later. Several times he postponed the summons. As he himself admitted later, "Of course, my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up. I was so nervous that I could not venture to speak in the morning session."

At last he came to the rostrum. Dr. J.H. Barrows, President of the Parliament, introduced him. He began, addressing the audience as 'Sisters and Brothers'. instantly, thousands, who were accustomed to hear "Ladies and gentlemen", rose in their seats and gave him loud applause. They were deeply moved to see at last, a man who discarded formal words and, considering them all as members of one family (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) spoke to them with the natural and candid warmth of a brother.

It took full two minutes before the tumult subsided. The Swami began his speech by thanking the youngest of the



nations in the name of the most ancient monastic order in the world, the Vedic order of Sanyasins. The keynote of his address was universal toleration and acceptance. He quoted from the scriptures the following two passages, revealing the Hindu spirit of toleration—

“As different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so O Lord the different paths which men take through tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

“Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him. All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me.”

He told the audience how India, even in olden times, had given political asylum or shelter to religious refugees of other lands—for instance, the Israelis and the Zoroastrians. In conclusion he pleaded for the quick termination of sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism.

The response was deafening applause. It appeared that the whole audience had been patiently awaiting his message of religious harmony. Whereas everyone of the other delegates had spoken for his own ideal or his own sect, the Swami had spoken about God who, as the ultimate goal of all faiths, is their inmost essence. The Swami gave utterance to the yearning of the modern world to break down the barriers of caste, colour and creed and to fuse all people into one humanity.

The Parliament of Religions offered Swami Vivekananda the long desired opportunity to present before the Western world the eternal and universal truths of his Aryan ancestors. He addressed the Parliament about a dozen times. His outstanding address was a paper on Hinduism in which he discussed Hindu metaphysics, psychology and theology.

Newspapers published his speeches and they were read with warm interest all over the country. The ‘New York Herald’ said, “He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how

foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.” At the Parliament of Religions, the organisers used to keep Vivekananda until the end of the programme to make people stay till the end of the session. The Chairman knew the old rule of keeping the best until the last. The four thousand people in the Hall of Columbus would sit smiling, waiting for an hour or two to listen to Vivekananda for fifteen minutes.

Vivekananda was an outspoken man. Whenever he found in American society signs of brutality, inhumanity, pettiness, arrogance and ignorance concerning cultures other than its own, he mercilessly criticised them. When small-minded people asked him irritating questions about India, based on malicious and erroneous reports, he fell upon them like a thunderbolt.

Swami Vivekananda was especially bitter about the religious hypocrisy of many Christian leaders. In a lecture given in Detroit he came out in one of his angriest moods, and declared in the course of his speech:

“You train and educate and clothe and pay men, to do what?—to come over to my country and abuse my forefathers, my religion, my everything. You walk near a temple and say, “You idolators! you will go to hell.” But the Hindu is mild. He smiles and passes on, saying, “Let the fool take.” And if I just touch you with the least bit of criticism, but with the kindest purpose, you shrink and cry. “Do not touch us. We are Americans (or English, etc. for that purpose). We criticise, curse and abuse all the heathens of the world, but do not touch us, we are sensitive plants.” But whenever your missionaries criticise us, let them remember this: If all India stands up and takes all the mud that lies at the bottom of the Indian Ocean and throws it up against Western countries, it will not be doing an infinitesimal part of what you are doing to us.”

Continuing the Swami said that military conquests of the Western nations and the activities of the Christian

missionaries, strangely enough, often proceed side by side. Most people are converted for worldly reasons. But the Swami warned:

“Such things tumble down; they are built on sand; they cannot remain long. Everything that has selfishness for its basis, competition for its right hand and enjoyment as its goal, must die sooner or later.”

While returning to India, Vivekananda had some dispute with two Christian missionaries on the ship. They were criticising Hinduism in a vulgar way. Swamiji reached them and holding one of them by the neck, thundered, “If you abuse my religion, I will throw you overboard.” The missionary apologised to him, saying, “Let me go, Sir, I will never do it again.”

Thereafter, one day the Swami asked one of his disciples in Calcutta, “What would you do, if someone insulted your mother?” The disciple replied: “I will fall upon him and teach him a good lesson.” “Bravo,” said the Swami. Now, if you had the same feeling for your religion, your tru’è”mother, you could never see any Hindu brother converted to Christianity. Yet, you see this occurring everyday and you are indifferent. Where is your faith? Where is your patriotism ? Everyday Christian missionaries abuse Hinduism at your face and how many are amongst you whose blood boils with righteous indignation and who stand up in its defence?”

“The Christians talk so much about universal brotherhood, but their belief that ‘no one, who is not a Christian, can be good’ exposes their liberalism and catholicity.”

Never did Vivekananda forget, in the midst of the comforts and luxuries of America, even when he was borne on the wings of triumph from one city to another, the cause of the Indian masses, whose miseries he had witnessed while wandering as an unknown monk from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. The prosperity of the new country only stirred up in his soul deeper commiseration for his own people. He had seen with his own eyes what human

efforts could accomplish to banish from society poverty, superstition, squalor, disease and other handicaps of human well-being. On August 20, 1893, he wrote to instil courage into the depressed hearts of his devotees in India:

“Gird up your loins, my boys! I am called by the Lord for this....The hope lies in you—in the meek, the lowly, but the faithful. Feel for the miserable and look up for help—it shall come. I have travelled for twelve years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I have gone from door to door of the so-called “rich and great’. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world, seeking help. The Lord is great. I know, He will help me. I may perish of cold and hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you youngmen this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed....Go to Him and make a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of a whole life for whom He loves above all—the poor, the lowly, the oppressed. Glory unto the Lord! You will succeed. Hundreds will fall in the struggle, hundreds will be ready to take it up. Faith, fiery faith and fiery sympathy. Life is nothing, death is nothing. Glory unto the Lord. March on, the Lord is our general. Do not look back to see who falls, continue to move forward.”

Swami Vivekananda realised that such noble concepts as the divinity of the soul and the brotherhood of man were mere academic theories in present-day India, whereas America showed how to apply them in life. He was indignant when he compared the generosity and liberality of the wealthy men in America in the cause of social service, with the apathy of the Indians as far as their own people were concerned. “No religion on earth,” he wrote angrily, “preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion of earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. Religion is not at fault, but the Pharises and Sadducees.”

He was convinced by his intimate knowledge of the Indian people that the life current of the nation, far from

being extinct, was only submerged under the dead weight of poverty and ignorance. India still produced great saints whose message of the spirit was sorely needed by the Western world. But the precious jewels of spirituality discovered by them were hidden in filth. The Western world was caught in the maze of its incessant activity—interminable movement without any goal. The hankering for material gains, without a higher spiritual goal and a feeling of universal sympathy, might flare up among the nations of the West into jealousy and hatred, which would ultimately bring about their own destruction. What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but in the process loses his self?

Vivekananda was a lover of humanity. The task before him was tremendous, for he had a double mission to perform. He wanted to obtain from the Americans money, scientific knowledge and technical help for the regeneration of the Indian masses, and, in return, to give the Americans the knowledge of the Eternal Spirit to endow their material progress with happiness and bliss. No false pride would prevent him from learning from American the many features of her material and social superiority. He also exhorted the Americans not to allow racial arrogance to prevent them from accepting the gift of spirituality from India. Through this policy of acceptance and mutual respect he dreamt of creating a healthy human society for the ultimate welfare of man's body and soul.

He had already thought of bringing to America some of his brother disciples as preachers of Vedanta. He also wanted to send some of his American and English disciples to India to teach science, industry, technology, applied sociology and other practical things which India needed to improve its social conditions and raise their standard of living. He often told his American disciples of his vision that the time would come when the lines of demarcation between East and West would be obliterated.

A letter signed by forty-two of his friends and admirers said “We, Western Aryans, have been so long separated from our Eastern brothers that we had almost forgotten our identity, of origin, until you came and with your beautiful presence and matchless eloquence rekindled within our hearts the knowledge that we of America and you of India are one.”

Swami Vivekananda believed in practical spirituality. One day a youngman complained to him, “Sir, I sit still in meditation, shutting the door of my room and keep my eyes closed as long as I can, but I do not find peace of mind. Can you show me the way?” ‘

“My boy,” replied the Swami in a voice full of loving sympathy, “if you take my word, you will have first of all to open the door of your room, and look around, instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in your neighbourhood, you have to serve them to the best of your ability. You will have to nurse and procure food and medicine for the sick in them. You will have to teach the ignorant. My advice to you is that if you want peace, you will first have to serve others to the best of your ability.”

And Vivekananda himself practised what he preached. Therein lies his greatness.

## What Swami Vivekananda Said

### *On Hinduism*

1. From the high spiritual flights of Vedanta Philosophy of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echos, to the low ideas of idolatory and its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in Hindu religion.

2. Not with standing the differences and controversies existing in various sects, there are in them too several grounds of unity—(1) Almost all of them admit the existence of three entities, i.e., Ishwara, Atman and Jagat. Ishwara is one who is eternally creating, preserving and destroying the universe. Then the doctrine of Atma and incarnation of the soul. It maintains that innumerable individual souls acquire body after body, again and again, going round and round in the wheel of birth and death according to their deeds in previous births. This is the doctrine of rebirth. (पुनर्जन्म) Then, there is this Jagat or universe without beginning and without end. Though some (Advaitavadins) hold these three as three different phases of one only; some others (Dvaitavadin) as three distinctly different entities and others again in various other ways, yet they are all unanimous in believing in these three.

### *On The Vedas*

1. The cardinal features of the so-called Hindu religion are founded on the meditative and speculative philosophy and on the ethical teachings of the Vedas.

2. The Vedas are the final authority in all matters and for all times and all places. In case of dilference between the Vedas and the Furanas, the Smritis and others, the authority of the Vedas will prevail.

3. The Puranas contain many things which are not consistent with the Vedas. All such things should be discarded.

4. Our Dharma is not based on any particular individual, but on universal and eternal truths. What Krishna said is accepted because that is consistent with the Vedas, not that the Vedas are authentic because Krishna endorsed them.

5. Vedas are the source of all true knowledge. All that we know today can be traced to the Vedas.

6. The Hindus do not believe that the Vedas were revealed piece-meal, i.e., some portion was revealed in the beginning and the rest later. They firmly believe that the entire Veda was delivered at one time. In fact they were not composed. They existed in God from eternity.

7. All other scriptures change with the times, but not the Vedas. All other scriptures have limited jurisdiction; but the Vedas, being repositories of universal truths, have universal jurisdiction.

8. Swami Vivekananda wanted to establish a Vedic College in the Matha. During discussion on the proposal (on the day of his death)—Premananda asked—“What will be the good of studying the Vedas?” “It will kill superstition”, Vivekananda said.

9. To Vivekananda the religion of the Hindus, based upon the teachings of the Vedas, appeared adequate to create the synthesis between the East and the West.

### *On Women*

1. We need women great women worthy to continue the traditions of Sanghamitra, Lilawati, Sita, Ahalyabai and Mirabai—women fit to be mothers of heroes, because they were pure, selfless, and strong with the strength that comes from touching the feet of God.

2. In the West, women did not very often seem to me women at all. They appeared to be quite the replicas of men, driving vehicles, drudging in offices, attending schools and doing professional duties. In India alone the sight of feminine modesty soothes the eyes.



3. To the women of England he said—“I should very much like our women to have your intellectuality but not if it must be at the cost of purity. Intellectuality is not the highest good. Morality and spirituality are the things we strive for. Our women are not so learned, but they are more pure.

Your men bow and offer a chair, but in another breath they offer compliments. They say: “Oh madam! how beautiful are your eyes. . . . ! What right have they to do this? How dare a man venture so far and how can your women permit it?”

No sooner are a young man and a young woman left alone then he pays compliments to her, and perhaps before he takes a wife he has courted two hundred women.

### *On Sanskrit*

Without good knowledge of Sanskrit a Hindu would remain an alien to his own rich culture and national heritage.

### *On Education*

1. Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages and encyclopaedias, the Rishis.

2. To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I were to do my education again and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and then with a perfect instrument I would collect facts at will.

3. Well, you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examination and deliver good lectures. But education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not

bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion, is it worth the name? ,

### *On Hindus*

1. When the Mohammedans first came, we are, I think, on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Moham medan historian, said to have been six hundred (?) millions. Now we are about two hundred millions. And then every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but more an enemy.

2. The vast majority of Hindu converts to Islam and Christianity are perverts by the sword or their descendents. Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their own mother-church, as it were; but on those who were alienated by conquest,—as in Kashmir and Nepal,—or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed.

3. Proselytism is allowed by Hindus.

4. You are hearing everyday, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, from men who ought to know better, denunciations of our religion, because it is not at all a conquering religion. To my mind that is the reason why our religion is truer than any other religion, because it never conquered, because it never shed blood, because it always preached love and sympathy to all. It is here and here alone that toleration and sympathy have become practical whilst it is theoretical in every other country; it is here and here alone, that Hindus built mosques for Mohammedans and churches for the Christians.

5. The Hindu religion and its ethical teachings are based on the teachings of the Vedas which proclaim that the soul is immortal. The body is subject to the law of growth and decay. What grows, must of necessity decay. But the indwelling spirit—the soul never had a beginning and it will never have an end.

### *Cause of our Degeneration*

1. If you grind down the people, you will suffer. We in India are suffering because of the wrath of God. The Hindu

elite subordinated the poor people for their own wealth; they did not hear the voice of distress, they ate from silver plates when the poor people were crying for bread. Taking the opportunity Mohammedans came upon them, slaughtering and killing; slaughtering and killing they overran them. India was conquered again and again for centuries; and the last and the worst of all came the Britishers. You look at India. What have the Hindus left? Wonderful temples everywhere. What have the Mohammedans left? Beautiful palaces. What have the Britishers left? Nothing but heaps of broken brandy bottles! And God had shown no mercy to the high-bred Hindus; because they had no mercy for others. By their hate and apathy they denigrated the common people; and when they needed their help, the common people had no strength to support them. If man does not believe in the justice of God, he certainly cannot escape from the verdict of history.

2. Nowadays, people blame those who constantly look back to the past. It is said that too much looking back to the past is the cause of India's woes. To me, however, it seems that the opposite is true. So long as they remained oblivious of their past, the Hindu community remained in a state of stupor; but as soon as they began to look back to the past, there was around fresh manifestation of life. It is out of this past that our future will take shape. To make it formidable we will have to build it on the solid foundations of our past.

3. The more the Hindus study the past, the more glorious will be their future, and whoever tries to bring the past to the present generation, is a great benefactor to his nation. The degeneration of India came not because its ancient laws and the customs had any flaw; but because they were not allowed to be carried to their legitimate conclusions.

No nation, no man can hate others and live peacefully himself. India's fate was sealed the very day when the Hindus invented the word 'mlechha' and stopped communication with others. One should be careful in fostering such divisive ideas.

Another great cause of the downfall of India was the creation of many unwanted customs based on hatred of those who belonged to other castes or creeds. Their real aim in ancient times might have been to prevent the Hindus from coming in contact with the surrounding Buddhist countries. However hard the ancient or modern sophistry may try to cover these facts, they have vindicated the moral law that none can hate others without degenerating himself. As a result, the race that was once foremost in the comity of nations, is now bygone, and is subject of scorn by other peoples.

### *The Way to Regeneration*

1. The country has crest fallen, no doubt; but it will surely rise again, and that upheaval will astound the world.

2. First go to other countries and study yourself carefully their problems and their way of working and ponder over them. Then read your own scriptures, and ancient literature. Travel throughout India and watch the people of its different regions, their ways and habits, with a keen eye.... You will clearly see that the nation is still compact and is pulsating with life. You will also find that hidden under the ashes of apparent misery and death, the fire of national regeneration is still smouldering.

Our ancient Vedic religion, with all its concepts and ideologies, has entered the blood-stream of this nation making it invulnerable to any political or social attack from outside.

3. Can you advance any reason why India should hold a lower position in the family of Aryan nations? Is she inferior in intellect? Is she inferior in dexterity? If you look at her art, at her literature and philosophy, you will emphatically say 'No'? All what is needed is that she should wake up from her age-long slumber and acquire its true position in the comity of nations.

4. You all have to give your shoulder to move the wheel of progress. Your duty at present is to go from one part of

the country to the other visiting village after village and make the people understand that mere sitting idle won't do any good. Make them understand their real condition saying, "O Ye brothers, arise and awake! How long you would remain asleep?" Go and advise them to improve their own condition, and make them comprehend the sublime truths of the scriptures, by presenting them in a lucid and simple way.... Also instruct them, in simple words, about the fundamental necessities of life. Make them expert in trade, commerce, agriculture, etc. If you cannot do this, then all your education and knowledge is meaningless

5. Religion for a long time has become stagnant in India. What we want is to make it dynamic. I want it to be brought into the life of every one. Religion, as it has been in the past, must find its place in the palaces of kings as well as in the cottages of the poor people. Religion in India must be made free and easily accessible to every one.

6. I have said again, and again, if there is darkness in a room if cannot be removed by merely bemoaning for it. Bring the light in the room, the darkness will vanish at once.

7. A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of service, fortified with eternal faith in God and mustering lion's courage and having sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden should go over the length and breadth of the country, preaching the gospel of truth, non-violence, righteous living fraternity and equality to make it a heaven on earth.

8. India will awake only when hundreds of large-hearted men and women giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will aim at and exert themselves to their capacity for the welfare of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking down into the, abyss of destitution and ignorance. One single soul possessed of these virtues can destroy the evil designs of many a hypocrites and ruthless people.

9. None will be able to withstand the force of truth, love and sincerity. Are you sincere, unselfish and loving by nature? If so, then fear not even death. Move on forward my youngmen. The whole world requires light and India alone has that light of the highest spiridual truth. That is why the Lord has sustained us, through all our vicissitudes until now.

### *India-Her Characteristics*

1. Our sacred motherland is the land of religion and philosophy. It is the birthplace of spirituality. This is the land of renunciators where from the most ancient to the most modern times, highest ideals of human life have been practised.

2. Every human race has its own peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Political supremacy or military power has never been our ambition, it never was, and it will never be. But there is another mission assigned to us. It is to preserve, increase and accentuate all the spiritual energy of our race, so that it may deluge the whole world, whenever circumstances are propitious.

3. Religious research scholars should disclose to the world that there is not a single country, possessing a good ethical code, which has not borrowed something from us ; and there is not one religion, professing the immortality of soul which has not derived the idea directly or indirectly from us.

4. If India dies, then from the world all spirituality will become extinct, all moral perfection will vanish, all love for religion will be washed out, all idealism will be forgotten and in its place will be taken by lust, avarice and physical comforts. As amassing wealth will be the only aim of life, humanity will be sacrificed at the altar of fraud, deceit and caprice. Can we allow such a situation to arise? No, never.