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**The Message
of
SWAMI
VIVEKANANDA**



by
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THE RAMAKRISHNA CENTRE OF SOUTH AFRICA
(Founded in 1942 by Swami Nischalananda)

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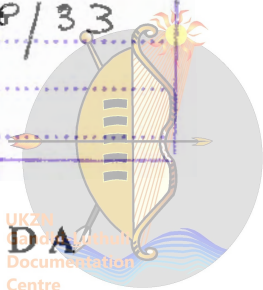
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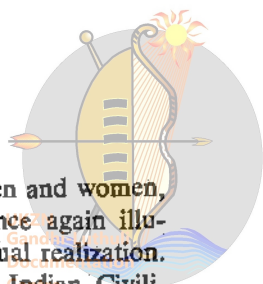
THE MESSAGE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

LIVING INDIA

Why is it that of all ancient civilizations that have grown and flourished on this planet, it is India's alone, that survives unbroken from the very dawn of history? There have been other great civilizations in this world. There were ancient Egypt and Babylon and there were the great South American civilizations of the Mayas and the Aztecs. There was a great flowering of the human spirit in different parts of the globe. But they all died and today the people living in those lands do not have any direct contact, any direct link, with those great achievements of the past. It is India alone that, despite all vicissitudes, despite the fact that we were under foreign domination for many centuries, despite all the turmoil and troubles through which we have passed, nevertheless, has succeeded in retaining our links with the very dawn of our civilization.

ROOTED IN THE SPIRIT

I think the answer lies in the very unusual phenomenon, that in India, whenever it appeared that the light was going out, whenever it appeared that the Indian spirit and civilization were finally going to succumb under the pressure of aggression from abroad or decay from within, whenever the spark and spirit of India appeared finally on the point of



extinction, there arose in this country, great men and women, who kept the torch of faith burning, who once again illumined this country with the fire of their spiritual realization. They once again, fanned the dying spark of Indian Civilization into a mighty flame that carried its light across the seven seas. The whole History of India can be looked upon from this point of view. You find situations in which we are surrounded by darkness, and the light once again, is reborn and the Indian spirit takes new courage and new sustenance.

THE LATEST RENAISSANCE

One such period, I would like to take your mind back, is the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1857, the first Indian War of Independence or the Indian Mutiny as it is generally known, had been crushed by the British and our country lay broken and prostrate at the feet of a foreign conqueror. This time, the defeat was not only physical and material, it was also spiritual, because, at that time, the people of India, had begun to feel that it was their religion and their culture, their philosophy and their civilization, that were the cause of their defeat. And there was a moral and spiritual vacuum, and it appeared once again that finally after so many centuries, the India, that we know, would pass away. But once again the same miracle occurred. Once again there was a rebirth and a renaissance and within a short period of a few decades India was once again regenerated and India was glowing with faith and confidence.

PIONEERS FROM BENGAL — SRI RAMAKRISHNA

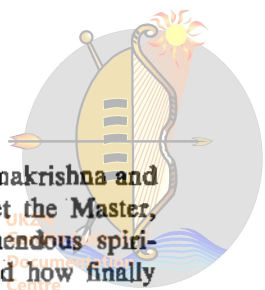
This is the most extraordinary thing that had happened. The renaissance began in Bengal. It was Bengal that



first had to face the impact of British rule and the Bengalees with their extraordinary qualities and gifts of mind and spirit, were the first to respond to new challenges that foreign domination was throwing before us. Raja Ram Mohan Roy is looked upon as the Father of Indian renaissance and it was he who started the social reform movements in order to purge our society of the evils and superstitions that had come to be covered with the name of religion. After him, Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore and Sri Keshab Chandra Sen of the Brahmo Samaj of India continued the renaissance. In Maharashtra, Mahadev Govind Ranade and R. G. Bhandarkar started the Prarthana Samaj. In Punjab, the Arya Samaj was started by Dayanand Saraswati. The Theosophical Society also did valuable work and so a number of movements of this type grew up throughout the century. But the main beacon light of spiritual power and strength that arose in the nineteenth century at a time when darkness was all around was in the form of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This extraordinary man, unlettered and untutored though he was, expressed in his personality and his life, the highest flights of spiritual achievement. And he became a veritable spiritual magnet, attracting to his feet at Dakshineswar, the rich and the poor, the wise and the uneducated, people from all corners of the country. They came to him in search of truth and in search of wisdom. And he, by the fire of his spiritual personality brought about a virtual spiritual renaissance in this country.

HIS BELOVED DISCIPLE

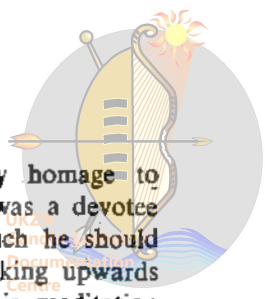
Among the many people, who came to the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, was one Narendranath Dutta, who subsequently became famous the world over as Swami



Vivekananda. The relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the way Swamiji first met the Master, how his rational mind tried to fight the tremendous spiritual power that Sri Ramakrishna expressed and how finally he surrendered himself to that power and became the leading disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, is a fascinating story. Swami Vivekananda lived a very short life, in the normally accepted sense of the term, only 39 years from 1863 to 1902. And yet how much did he achieve in this very short period! His was a rich life. I do not think it is necessary for me, on this occasion, to go into all its details, his boyhood, the domestic problems that he faced, his meeting with the Master, that tremendous moment in which he surrendered himself to Sri Ramakrishna and the floodgates of spiritual experience open to his psyche, and his experience, for the first time, of the tremendous impact of spiritual realization. Then came his period of discipleship, and after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, his travels as an itinerant monk throughout the length and breadth of this country.

THE ROCK OF AGES

Sethu Himalaya Paryantham (सेतु हिमालय पर्यन्तं), he travelled from the Himalayas down to this beautiful Kanyakumari at the feet of Mother India, where three great oceans meet. It was during these days of his travel, as an unknown and itinerant monk, that he swam across from here — the mainland — to the rock upon which now stands such a magnificent memorial. And he sat there and meditated upon India that had gone into the past, the India that existed at that time and the India that would arise in the future. Therefore it is particularly fitting that we are



meeting here in Kanyakumari today to pay homage to Swamiji. It is indeed fitting because Swamiji was a devotee and a worshipper of Mother India, and as such he should stand eternally at the feet of the Mother, looking upwards at the vision of India, that he saw during his meditation here.

SWAMIJI'S MISSION

After that, of course, he went abroad. Then followed his dramatic triumph at the Chicago Congress of Religions, his triumphant return to India this time not as an unknown monk but as a conquering hero: his second visit to Europe, the founding by him of the Ramakrishna Mission and then finally his Mahasamadhi after consecrating the Belur Mutt. In the course of this short life, Swami Vivekananda achieved virtually a miracle. He not only formulated the very essence of Hinduism, to meet the requirements of his age, but also of Religion itself, of Universal Religion. Because all the great teachers of India have always looked upon themselves as people who respect eternal truths, we do not claim them to be the authors of new truth. We can merely state that they have realised the truths of old and are restating them in the idiom of the modern age.

TODAY'S CRISIS OF FAITH

Today not only India, but the entire world, faces a deep crisis. The past that we know is crumbling before our eyes and the future is struggling to be born. And our generation finds itself poised precariously between the past and the future. It is an interesting situation in the world today. On the one hand, Science and Technology, have



given men unrivalled and unprecedented power to transform, if he so desires, life on this planet, to wipe away poverty, misery, ignorance, disease, want and suffering. On the other hand, this very power can, if misused, lead to the complete annihilation not only of human race, but indeed of all life upon this planet. And therefore, today, mankind finds itself poised at a crucial cross-road on its long and tortuous history of the last many thousand years upon this planet. Let us think about this. It seems to me that the message of Swami Vivekananda is even more needed today than it was at the time when he delivered it. I will try this evening to share with you what I consider to be the main feature of Swami Vivekananda's message, which we should look upon not merely with a historical interest but as something which has touched each one of us and touched the future of human race very deeply. Swamiji said, and I quote his words, "My ideal indeed can be put into a few words. To preach unto mankind their Divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life."

UNIFYING TRUTHS

There is one aspect of his message, that I would like to place before you and that is his stress on the unity of all Religions. Unity, we must remember, not tolerance, because tolerance is essentially a negative aspect, a negative approach. In other words, you are prepared to tolerate people other than your own. You do not persecute them; you just tolerate them. But this was not what Swamiji meant. His approach was a positive one — born out of the Sadhana and realisation of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Even the course of his spiritual practices had actually followed the disciplines of various religions and had found that

they reach finally the same goal. The *Rig Veda* has it, “*Ekam Sat Vipra bahuda Vadanthi*” (एकं सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति). The truth is one ; there may be many ways of reaching it. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says :

यथा नद्यः स्यन्दमानाः समुद्रेऽस्तंगच्छन्ति नामरूपे विहाय ।

तथा विद्वान्नामरूपाद्विमुक्तः परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम् ॥

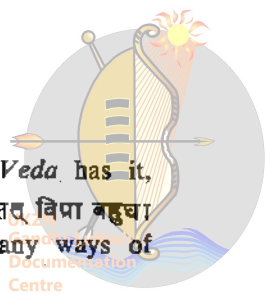
Yatha nadyah syandamanah samudre

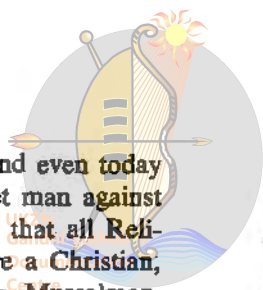
astam gacchanti namarupe vihaya |

Tatha vidvannamarupadvimuktah

paratparam purushamupaiti divyam ||

As brooks rising from different parts of the country finally find their way to the same ocean so do the various religions known to man rise in different parts of the world but all ultimately lead towards the same spiritual goal. This is one of the basic features of our civilization and, I think, one of the keys for our survival and persistence in all parts and ages. And therefore the first point Swamiji emphasized was the unity of all religions ; all bigotry, hatred and persecution which is done in the name of religion are in fact completely against the spirit of religion. It is indeed a travesty of religion, because anybody who is a truly religious man can never use the powers of religion to hurt anybody else. Religion teaches ultimately that all men are bound together in their divinity. And therefore, these people who try to preach bigotry in the name of religion, who try to wage war in the name of religion are people who do not understand the very basis upon which all religions have been born. This is true. This we would do well to remember today, because not only India, but the whole world is





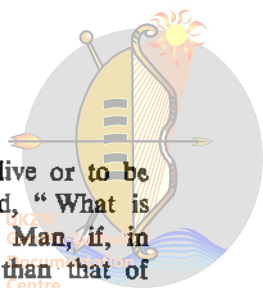
full of people belonging to different religions, and even today we find that the name of religion is used to set man against man. And therefore Swamiji's first point was that all Religions are one. He used to say that if you are a Christian, try to be a better Christian and if you are a Mussalman, try to be a better Mussalman and if you are a Hindu, a believer in Sanatana Dharma, then try and really drink again at the springs of your spiritual foundations if you really call yourself religious.

DIVINITY IN MAN

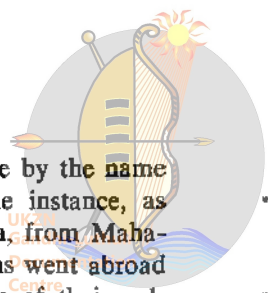
The second point, closely allied to this, is the Divinity of Man. The Upanishads have an extraordinary word for it, "*Amritasya Putrah!*" (अमृतस्य पुत्राः) Children of Immortality!!! The Seers of the Upanishads saw that all human beings, irrespective of their race, their creed, their language, their religions, their nationality, their place of residence, the colour of their skin, or the texture of their hair contain within them the spark of Divinity. And therefore they are bound together by a Divine Bond, that no amount of bigotry, and no amount of pettiness can ultimately sunder. Swamiji spoke of the Divinity of Man and along with it, the unity of Mankind. Our message, our approach should cover within its ambit, the entire human race.

HUMAN DIGNITY — SERVICE TO MAN

Assuredly from this, arises the third point, the Dignity of the Individual. When Swamiji sat on the Rock at Kanyakumari and looked at India and meditated upon it, he saw before him a picture of misery. He saw before him, a country, in which millions of people do not have



enough to eat, to wear or the wherewithal to live or to be educated. He was deeply pained and he said, "What is the use of preaching religion, the Divinity of Man, if, in fact, men live in a condition which is worse than that of animals?" And that was a basic factor of his teachings, the Dignity of Man and the Service of man and his society. He went to the extent of saying that to preach religion to someone who is starving is a sin. First of all you must see that he gets enough to eat. That is to see that he gets the minimum wherewithal to wear and to live. Then only, your religious preaching will have any real meaning for him. And it is for this reason that Swamiji was able to bridge the gap between religious pursuits and service to Society. We have a lot of very great Sannyasins in India but mostly they are going to the Himalayas or into the caves and practise there their spiritual devotions and meditations. But Swami Vivekananda in the nineteenth century saw quite clearly that unless the divorce between Religion and Society was annuled, unless people of Religion also looked upon themselves as servants of Society, nothing will be achieved. And he saw that one of the main reasons for the degradation of India was that people who were interested in Religion were not interested in Society and people who were in society were not interested in Religion. It was for this reason that he constantly preached the gospel of service and renunciation — "*Thena Tyaktena Bhunjeetha*" (तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा) You can renounce the world inwardly but outwardly you must be involved in its service — "*Atmano Mokshartham Jagadhitaya cha*" (आत्मनो मोक्षार्थं जगद्धिताय च). You can work for your own salvation and for the welfare of the world, and it was for this reason that Swamiji thundered against



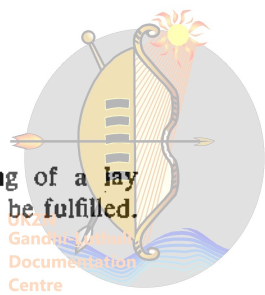
the absurd superstitions, taboos that have gone by the name of religion in this country. To give you one instance, as you know from the great spots of South India, from Mahabalipuram and elsewhere, centuries ago, Indians went abroad into South East Asia and carried the message of their culture, their art, their religion, and their architecture to the people who lived in those islands. That was one phase and another phase, we find in the nineteenth century when we had become so narrow that anybody who went abroad had to do *Prayaschitta* when he came back before he was accepted into society. It is a fantastic thing. A nation which could produce people, whose vision was able to comprehend the entire human race, had become narrowed down to the four walls of casteism and communalism and this ridiculous kitchen-religion and taboos. Swamiji was one of the most powerful religious reformers in this country. How for example can a situation continue in which on the one hand you say that all persons are Divine, "*Amritasya Putrah*" (अमृतस्य पुत्राः) and on the other hand you discriminate against people just because they happen to be born in a certain class, in a certain caste, in a certain community? The evil of untouchability was rampant in the nineteenth century and Swamiji saw quite clearly that unless we are able to shed these weaknesses that have entered into the body-politic, India would never be able to grow to its full stature.

And therefore Swamiji's third message was the Dignity of Man and Service to Society. And it was for this purpose that he founded the Ramakrishna Mission which is doing such extraordinary good work within this country and throughout the world. And I am sure that it is with this purpose also that the second aspect of this great Rock


Memorial that I have seen today, the founding of a lay mission in the name of Swami Vivekananda, will be fulfilled.

A GREAT PATRIOT

Then, lastly, Swamiji had a deep and divine love for India. He looked upon India, not merely as a collection of mountains and rivers and streams and forests, but as a virtual living entity, as a Goddess, as Bharati Bhavani, as a spiritual entity to whom we should sacrifice everything if we are to achieve spiritual realisation. This is also an important theme, that rang through Swamiji's speeches and which in fact enthused a whole generation of nationalists including people like Sri Aurobindo, who later were to become great revolutionaries and philosophers. And Swamiji had this love for India which again today we have got to reiterate. All of us look upon ourselves as Indians, certainly. All will join easily enough in singing the National Anthem and raising the National Flag. But when it comes to lesser loyalties, whether it is loyalty to one's caste, to one's language, to one's State, to one's political party, we often find people functioning in a manner which weakens the unity of India. And I think Swamiji's intense, glowing love for India has to be recreated today if we are to fulfil the vision that he saw when he was sitting on the Rock at Kanyakumari. And this was again love which comprehended all the weaknesses of India. It was a love which did not merely try to brush aside all that was weak in India, but which realised that these are the weaknesses and if you are a true devotee of India, you have to fight these weaknesses. This is the position today also. In this respect also, Swamiji's speeches continue to be a source of inspiration to us.



HIS UNIVERSALITY



And finally Swamiji's vision went beyond India. He did not want the regeneration of India, only as an Indian nationalist. He wanted Indian regeneration, rebirth, renaissance because he was convinced that India had a message for the world. He was convinced that India had a spiritual destiny to fulfil for mankind which it could only do if it first shed its own fetters, if it first set its own house in order, if it first purged itself of its own sense of weaknesses. Then, Swamiji felt, that India could be the Guru of humanity. And therefore, you must remember that Swamiji, although a great Indian, was much more than an Indian. His message is as relevant today for the people of the world outside India, as it is for Indians themselves.

POWER FROM TRUTH

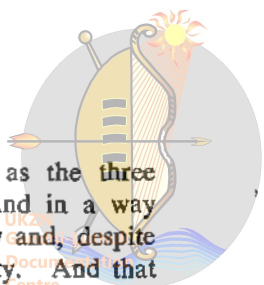
These, as I see, are the main facets of his teachings and I think it is important to remember that he always stressed the importance of strength in achieving these objectives. Shakti, Strength, is of two kinds, creative and destructive. There is Daivic Shakti and there is the Asuric Shakti also. We must be very careful because when we enter the realm of strength and Shakti-pooja, the two paths go very closely, alike and unless we are careful we will become worshippers of power like Hitler or Stalin or people who became mad because they worshipped the Asuric Shakti and not the Daivic Shakti. We must remember that Swamiji preached the primacy of the Daivic Shakti, Divine Power, the Power of harmony and not of disharmony, the power of love and not of hate, the power of integration and not of disintegration.

AN IDEAL FOR YOUTH



Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu Shaktirupena (या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता). This is the Shakti that resides in the heart of all beings. And this is the Shakti that must be worshipped if we are to reach our goal — material or spiritual. And he said, I quote him again, “And here is the test of Truth. Anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison. There is no hope in it. It cannot be true. Truth is strengthening.” So, for the achievement of his ideals, Swamiji looked upon the power of Shakti. And his message was particularly directed to the youth of the country and I am glad to see in the audience this evening, many people belonging to the younger generation. Because it was to them that Swamiji mainly spoke and he said that we need youths with “muscles of iron and nerves of steel”. It is going to be no easy task to build the new India. In India today, fully one-seventh of the human race resides and we still have the backlogs of poverty, ignorance, and illiteracy. If these are to be finally overcome we will require a new generation, a younger generation committed and dedicated to these ideals. In India today, the youth is going through a very difficult stage. It has to choose between the pulls of two Shaktis. There is a power of destruction, of bomb-throwing, of outrages, of violence, and on the other hand there is the power of construction, the power whereby a country can be rebuilt. These two paths are open to us today. And I would submit that Swamiji has laid before us a goal which we should follow, the goal of the Unity of India.

The most important thing today is to reiterate our unity. From all over India, we have met here today at



the feet of Mother India in the same way as the three oceans meet at the feet of Mother India. And in a way it is symbolic of the fact that India is a Unity and, despite what anyone may say, India will remain a unity. And that is the destiny of India to develop and grow as a unified nation. It is here that we are going through difficult times today, but consider how much more difficult the times must have been when Swami Vivekananda preached. That was at a time when foreigners were ruling in this country, when it was a sin to mention our own *Bande Mataram*. *Bande Mataram* could not be uttered in public because it was banned by our foreign rulers. It was a time when there was complete fragmentation and atomisation in India. If, at a time like that, Swamiji did not quail, did not fear, did not despair, why should we despair today? It is true that we are in difficult times. But then, times are never easy. No nation is built unless generations are prepared to dedicate their lives, their sweat, their toil and their tears for it. And I would suggest that if India is to achieve its destiny, as I am sure it will, we in our generation have got to rededicate ourselves to it. It seems to me that there is no better guide in these troubled times than Swami Vivekananda. He stands in this magnificent Rock Memorial, looking at India. It is his vision. He is a Rishi, a Drashta, a seer. He has seen the vision of India. It is for people like you and me to try and fulfil that vision. It may not be fulfilled in a single life-time. What, after all, is one's life-time in the history of a country which has a recorded past of many thousands of years? But we must work towards it. We must fight all tendencies that go against the unity of India, that go against the unity of Religion, that go against the Divinity of Man, that go against the service and uplifting of Society. We must strengthen all



those forces within our selves and outside which are committed to the regeneration of India. This to my mind is the truest way of paying our homage to Swami Vivekananda. He used always to quote that magnificent passage from the *Kathopanishad* that we should Arise, Awake and stop not until the Divine Goal was reached. It is a difficult task. It is as sharp and difficult to tread on as the razor's edge. But we must press forward. There is no turning back. India has embarked upon its Destiny. No power in the world now can turn it back. How soon it reaches its destiny depends upon people like you and me, and upon whether we are able to understand what Swamiji has said, to make it a part of our lives and to live it in our day-to-day existence. With these words, my friends, I will take leave of you, quoting finally the great message from the *Kathopanishad* that Swamiji was so fond of.

उत्तिष्ठत जामत प्राप्यवरान्निबोधत ।
 क्षुरस्य धारा निशितादुरत्यया
 दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥

Utthishtata, Jagrata, Prapya varannibodhata |
Kshurasya Dhara nishita duratyaya
Durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti ||





SOCIAL SERVICE

Those who try to serve humanity without believing in God cannot keep it up for a long time. After a while a question crops up,

“What shall I gain from this?”

And once this question arises, one begins to lose interest. If a man wants to serve others, he will have to make some personal sacrifice. You must realise that the desire to sacrifice for the sake of others cannot come unless one believes in God.

— *Swami Adbhutananda*
(A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna)



“The more heart you will be able to manifest, the greater will be the victory you achieve. It is only a few that understand the language of the brain, but everyone, from the Creator down to a clump of grass, understands the language that comes from the heart.”

— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

“Our saluations go to all the past Prophets whose teachings and lives we have inherited, whatever might have been their race, clime, or creed!

Our saluations go to all those Godlike men and women who are working to help humanity, whatever be their birth, colour, or race!

Our salutations to those who are coming in the future — living Gods — to work unselfishly for our descendants.”

— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA