

## Application of Practical Vedanta in Today's Context

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Swami Vivekananda had a South Indian disciple, Singaravellu Mudaliar, whom he lovingly called 'Kidi' meaning a parrot in Tamil language. This disciple was a professor of philosophy in one of the very famous colleges of Madras at that time. He was initially an agnostic and challenged Swamiji and one day Swamiji said to him: Kidi, if you want to challenge me, don't come too near me. Kidi said: If I touch you, can you transform me? Swamiji said: Kidi, don't attempt it. However, Kidi did it and he was transformed to such an extent that he became almost like a recluse.

Anyway, that is a different story. But let this be known that Vivekananda could give this transforming touch. He had that power though he did not exercise it. By his mere will he could raise the spiritual consciousness of thousands of people whom he addressed in the West. And he knew that. There is an instance in his life when he was speaking, and so much power was emanating from his person that the spiritual consciousness of thousands of people listening to him was instantly roused to a very high level. Suddenly Swami Vivekananda left the podium and went away. Many people thought he was sick. Some said, perhaps Swamiji had forgotten to memorize the speech which he was to give. But they did not know Swamiji too well, for Swamiji never prepared his lecture. He never consulted notes when he spoke. Later on Swamiji was asked by someone,

'Swamiji, why did you suddenly stop and go away?' He replied; Look, I could feel that a kind of power was welling up inside by which I could have transformed the spiritual consciousness of the entire audience instantly and given them liberation. But my philosophy would not allow it. Vedanta says everybody has to go according to the path to which he or she is born.

So, that was the power which he could radiate. In his letter to 'Kidi' written from Chicago on 3 March 1894, Swamiji made some very significant statements. The two famous, oft-quoted assertions about education and religion, namely 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man', and 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man' occurred in this letter. There he also gave some very remarkable insights into the prospect of individual and collective life based upon the Vedantic ideal and so on, for he believed 'Advaita will be the future religion of thinking humanity'.

The second letter which I am going to refer to is one which Swamiji wrote to Alasinga Perumal from USA on 17 February 1896. There Swamiji wrote: 'Just as I am writing to you, every one of my bones is paining after last afternoon's long Sunday public lecture. Then you see, to put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at

the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—ie a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed.'

This is a very important statement made by Swamiji himself about what he came for and about his mission in life. Mark the words—'The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life. . . .' That was the essence of the Practical Vedanta which Swamiji spoke about.

Vedanta means the Upanishadic wisdom that is found at the end of the Vedas—'*Vedanta*'; *anta* is the end. But the question is: How can this Vedantic wisdom become practical? Vedanta obviously appears very abstract to all of you. It is quite natural that it should appear abstract because when we talk of 'practicality' in the modern world, we talk about being successful in life, in all this mad race which is going on everywhere! How to succeed in life as a person, how to earn a lot of money is one's only concern in this matter-of-fact life. Therefore it is the sense of achievement, sense of conquest, sense of establishing oneself in society is what we call 'practicality' in modern life. Swamiji talked about this in his two famous lectures included in his 'My Master'. The first lecture he gave in the United States of America and the other in England. There he said to the Westerners: You have your own ideas of practicality and we have ours. You think it is very impractical for a person to talk about the soul and God and the other world and so on. But in India, if you go and say, 'Come, enjoy

the world, I will give you all the best things in the world', then all the doors will be shut to you. But if you say, 'Come, go to the top of that distant mountain and look at the tip of your nose for the rest of your life so that you can achieve liberation', there will be thousands of people to follow you with food and clothing and all that you need. That is the kind of 'practicality' which we possess. Anything which concerns Spirit, anything which concerns God, anything which is related to the other world, we take that to be the most practicable thing in life and we want to experiment with it even to the point of death. And you are 'practical' in your own way. Suppose someone says in the West, 'I would look at my nose on top of the mountain and I am going to beg my alms', you see, all the doors will be shut to you. You may even be jailed for it. But if you say, 'Come, I want to enjoy the world', then there would be thousands of opportunities for enjoying the world. That is your practicality. That is not our practicality.

So the word 'practicality' itself is a very misleading word because what we understand in the modern context as practicality is altogether different from what Swamiji said. We unfortunately teach our children—'Be practical', 'Be sensible', 'Earn money', 'Get more and more'. That is all about our modern-day practicality and at the end of this so-called 'practical' life, we become a frustrated individual, not related to himself or herself and to others. Have it, I am not against it. Swami Vivekananda himself was not against it. He said: See, India has been a slave for more than a thousand years. So let people enjoy a little. He was not against a little enjoyment. Bread, more bread, more opportunities for earning, he always stressed. That is necessary. But there comes a point when you have to ask yourself, 'Is that all to life?' This fundamental question about existence, life,

its meaning will have to be asked by every thinking individual unless he becomes an absolute animal which you and I just cannot be. You will be forced to ask certain very fundamental questions about life, about existence. 'Why am I here?' 'What is the destiny of a human being?' 'Where do I go after death?' 'Is there a life after death?' 'Is there God?' 'Is there a destiny which I am to attain?' Of course, you may evade these questions. You may shy away from these nagging questions. Nevertheless, again and again these questions will come up and haunt you. People will tell you, 'practical people' will tell you, 'Think about these issues in old age.' That is, when you become old and your hair have become grey, when the teeth have all fallen down, when you cannot any longer walk properly, you need the *Gītā* and the Upanishads and you may go to the Institute of Culture for listening to talks. But not now. Your time has not come. You are too young to listen to religious discourses.

Vivekananda, however, would say, now is the time when you are to listen to the religions discourses, not when you become crippled and old. When you have the energy of a lion, only then you can enquire into something which is very subtle. How much ability is required to probe the mystery of the inner world which is the subtlest of all realities! Only those *rishis* and *munis* who have done it will know. Swamiji said, this Vedanta which had remained for thousands of years in the forests, in the hills and in the caves, it has been given to him to bring out that wisdom from the caves and the forests and scatter them broadcast to everybody.

Two things Swamiji did. One is, he has made it understood that there is no place or time specifically assigned when you can discuss the Absolute Truth and you cannot discuss. We used to say, for example, that Upanishads cannot be discussed everywhere

and anywhere. Such study needs a very sacred place, it needs a very befitting ambience and so on. But we are discussing it here today in an airconditioned hall which the orthodox people will not only sneer at, they may even get shocked. What! discussing Upanishads in an airconditioned hall in Calcutta? So that is what Vivekananda did, ie removed the wrong notion.

Secondly, he threw the Vedantic knowledge open to everybody. You know, *adhikārivāda* is a very famous doctrine in Hindu religion and philosophy. There is a meaning in it, of course, as Christ said: Don't cast pearls before everybody, ie don't tell them who can't understand the value of these words. But Swamiji said, these Vedantic thoughts have to be thrown open to everyone. Those who feel that it is their *adhikāra* or birthright, to use Swamiji's word, let them pick it up. Here you feel the contrast between Vivekananda and even his own Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna picked and chose his disciples. He would not give everything to everybody. He would not give, for example, the highest wisdom directly except to Swami Vivekananda who he considered was the greatest among the Advaitic *adhikāris*. He will call Naren to his room, close the door very carefully, bring out a book from the bottom of his pillow and say, 'Naren, please read this *Ashtāvakra Samhitā*', one of the greatest treatises on Advaita. Naren, then conditioned as he was by the Brahma-Samaj, read a few lines and said: No I will not read this book, never touch it with a pair of tongs. It is blasphemy for me to say 'I am God, I am the Supreme Being'. Those *rishis* and *munis* who wrote these things were mad people. They were eccentrics. Sri Ramakrishna listened to his words and used to say: Listen, dear, you don't accept their views; then why do you abuse them for nothing? See, I am a fool. I

can't read Sanskrit. You read it for me.

So, in spite of his reluctance Narendranath read through the book again and again and day after day till the Advaitic wisdom settled in his consciousness and transformed him totally. Sri Ramakrishna gave him the highest Advaitic experience, and Vivekananda, who refused at that time to believe and say that he was God himself, the Supreme Being, the Brahman, later on when he went to West, he spoke from the podium exhorting everybody: Never forget the glory of human nature. Buddhas and Christs are but the waves of the Infinite Ocean that I am (touching his heart).

This utterance was exactly in accord with the spirit of the declaration of the *Ashtāvakra Samhitā*, (II. 25) where the sage said:

*Mayyanantamahāmbodhāshcharya  
jivavichayah /*

*Udyanti ghnanti khelanti pravishanti  
svabhāvatah //*

That is, 'I am the Infinite Ocean of Consciousness. Waves after waves of individual *jivas* and *jagat* are rising from It, playing for a time and then disappearing into It again.' This is what his Master Sri Ramakrishna taught him only and not others such as Rakhai (later Swami Brahmananda) and so on. Swamiji himself confessed in one place that as a rule his Master never taught Advaita to anybody, but 'he taught it to me'. Now the question is, why did this Vivekananda, who was taught exclusively by Sri Ramakrishna, throw that Advaitic wisdom open to everybody? Why? Was he then defying his Master's mandate? Did he behave differently? This question was also put to Swamiji. There is an unpublished record of this conversation with one of his disciples. Swami Dhiresananda referred to this dialogue in an article published in the *Udbodhan*. There we find a disciple asking Swamiji if his propaga-

tion of Advaitic knowledge to all and sundry is justified, especially when his Guru Sri Ramakrishna was so choosy and discriminating. To that question Swamiji's answer was plain and simple. He said that Sri Ramakrishna had the rare capacity to assess the potential and fitness of a person as soon as he saw him. 'But I have no time to make such judgement. I have given it to all. He, who is really fit, will accept the teaching', added Swamiji. Secondly, he said that this Advaitic knowledge is such a jewel that it will do only good and never harm anyone. So, let anyone who is willing take it.

That was that heart of the man, the Buddha-heart or the heart of great Rāmānuja! Do you know the life story of Rāmānuja? Before giving *mantra* to Rāmānuja, his Guru said to him: Look, I am giving you a very sacred *siddha mantra*. Don't tell it to anybody.' Rāmānuja said, 'Why? What will happen if I say?' Then his Guru got angry and said, 'You want to defy my instruction? If you tell this *mantra* to anybody, that person will immediately get liberation and you will go to hell for defying *Guru-vākya*.' Do you know what Rāmānuja did? Instantly he went to the top of a hill and called upon everybody saying, 'Come you all; I am going to give you a very sacred *mantra* which will liberate everybody and I will gladly go to hell.' That was the heart of the saint! Swamiji was very fond of this incident. Sri Ramakrishna also went to Star Theatre to see *Rāmānuja Charit* written by Girish Chandra Ghosh.

Such was the heart of Swamiji also! Remember, you and I would not be here in this hall at all discussing this Vedanta philosophy if it was not enunciated by Swamiji and given to us so liberally. So we are eternally grateful to this great soul who brought this Vedanta from the forests and caves and gave it to everybody, gave to you and me who are the poorest of *adhikāris*. Swamiji knew it,

but he also knew that this wisdom must be thrown open to everybody because this wisdom is not only not destructive, but also eternally elevating. However little you practise, it will give you the highest elevation as the *Gītā* says, *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*, 'Even a little practice of this *dharma* will save you from great fear.'

Swamiji was aware of the strength of Hinduism as well as our shortcomings in matters of application of the philosophy in day-to-day life. Therefore he himself said, 'No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism.' But why? Swamiji said, 'Religion is not in fault'. Mark his words. He said, 'Hear, me, my friend, I have discovered the secret through the grace of the Lord'. What is that secret? 'Religion is not in fault'. But the Pharisees and Sadducees of Hinduism who used religious doctrines for their own selfish ends are responsible for the despicable situation. Remove priestcraft from this Hindu religion and we have one of the grandest religions of the world! That was his statement which reveals that we are smart enough! Some of the grandest doctrines and mind-boggling truth are all authentically recorded in our Upanishads—the truth about Brahman, the origin of the universe, the destiny of the human being and so on. But the common man was denied this wisdom on the ground that it is *rahasya vidyā* or very secret knowledge *Upanishad* means *rahasya*, so the Upanishadic knowledge should not be given to everybody. As a result, only the sannyasins who renounced the world and lived in forests and caves quietly pursued their studies and tried to get emancipation.

Swamiji sought to reverse this situation. He said he has been born to distribute this wealth to everybody, to the people of

Calcutta, Madras and all the cities of the world. Sri Ramakrishna told him to look after the people of 'Calcutta', ie modern educated people or worldly people who pass their days without knowing the true religion. Swamiji therefore said that this Upanishadic wisdom has to be made practical. The theories we have are to be made practical. So he enunciated certain fundamental principles culled from the Upanishads and placed before us one ideal. And that ideal is—'That thou art'—you are Divine. This is the essence of Vedanta. After all its ramifications and intellectual gymnastics you know that the human soul is pure and omniscient. Birth and death are mere superstitions, entire nonsense when spoken in connection with the Soul. Not believing in the glory of your own soul is what Vedanta calls atheism. This is a very fundamental teaching of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta. We have so many interpretations of the *mahāvākya*s (the great sayings of the Upanishads) based on the logic of those times. But Swami Vivekananda said, leave all those logic-chopping. The fundamental truth of the *mahāvākya*—*Tat tvam asi* or *Aham brahmāsmi* is that I am not the small limited entity encased in this body and the mind. I have infinite possibilities to manifest. But how is it that I do not know that I am the Infinite, that I am the omniscient? I feel small and limited, I feel pain in my neck, I cannot walk properly, I feel I am ignorant, I feel I am jealous, I feel I am depressed. So how can you say that I am the Infinite Supreme Being? *Nitya shuddha mukta svarupa, nitya ānanda svarupa*? In Swamiji's language, this is because we have 'hypnotized' ourselves. This is the result of self-hypnotism. But you will say, 'The fact is that I feel small, I feel ignorant, I feel depressed. These are all facts of my daily experience. But, Swamiji, you are teaching something that

goes against my experience! Which is real? My experience or your teaching? Perhaps you are trying to hypnotize me by telling me all these. A doctor also says like that when I report to him that I feel very tired. He would suggest: "Tell yourself that you are not tired and day by day you will feel that you are getting better and better." Is your teaching a kind of similar self-hypnosis, Swami?"

Swami Vivekananda was also asked this question. He smiled and said: yes. But the only difference is, it is de-hypnotization. Life after life you have been taught that you are small and you believed it. Therefore you feel you are small, ignorant, limited, stupid, depressed and so on. But Vedanta comes and tells you that you are not this limited entity. So Vedanta *de-hypnotizes* you and never hypnotizes you. This is the whole Vedantic wisdom and the Vedantic technique of de-hypnotization. As a result, you realize that you are Divine.

Swami Tapasyananda has written about Swamiji's famous four *sutras* which he calls the 'neo-Brahmasutras'. The first *sutra* is 'Each soul is potentially divine'. The second *sutra* is 'The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.' The third *sutra* is 'Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free'. Lastly, 'This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details'.

Swamiji repeatedly said, tell yourself every moment that you are not this small entity. Assert your real nature. The secret is that if you go on according to the truth of your own being, the truth will ultimately manifest itself. Christ also said in the Bible—Thou shalt know the truth and truth shalt make thee free. To attain freedom nothing external is necessary. All that you need to know is that

your true nature is Divine. You are eternally free. You have been free, you are free, and you shall always remain free. The question is, why do I imagine that I am small by birth? Just because I feel I am conditioned by a body! You may ask: Do I have to believe it simply because you say it, simply because the *rishis* said it, simply because Swami Vivekananda mentioned it? No. Vedanta says, go home and analyse your own experience. Your experience is the waking world that you see now. I am talking to you. All of you are listening to me. This is an experience which you and I go through. And when I sleep I create a world of my own. Don't you create it every day? Yes, you do day after day and night after night. You and I create worlds of fantasies of our own. We live and move in them. Who does'nt?

When I sleep and create a world in a dream, I become the *creator*. Don't you realize therefore the glories of human consciousness? The creator God who creates the universe is identical with me because I can also create my own world in dream. You may say, 'O Swami, that is not real'. But how do you know that it is not real? Is this visible world more real than the one you create in dream?

Bertrand Russell once asked: If I sleep and dream for twelve hours a day and if I am in the waking state exactly for twelve hours, which one is real? You say that something is unreal because the other one is real. You say that because you have been conditioned to believe that something is real. But why do you not see the other way round? Thus you see, we know relatively. And when I have a deep sleep or *sushupti* I do not see anything, absolutely nothing. I cannot experience a single thing then. Nobody can talk to me. There is no 'I', there is no 'you'. There prevails one homogeneous mass of consciousness in which there is no 'you' and 'I'. Yet I am intensely happy. Am I not happy when I

go to sleep? Who will say that he or she will not sleep because he or she will lose his or her consciousness? On the contrary, we are very happy to go to sleep and to lose the sense of 'I' because I know that is a state of supreme happiness. Therefore, there is a state of consciousness in which I feel supremely happy, absolutely bereft of all sorrow because there is no 'I' or 'you' and the *bhedaprapancho* completely ceases to exist.

Therefore, Vedanta says, analyse your own experience and find out which is real. Vedanta says there are three states—the waking state, the dream state and deep sleep state—which will come and go; these are the cycles which are experienced by 'you' and 'I'. But then, there is a supreme 'I' which is not at all connected with any of these 'I's which is allowing these states to happen. Just look at It and it is what Vedanta is.

It appears very abstract, but Vivekananda wanted to make this abstract truth living and poetic in everyday life. How to apply this Truth in our day-to-day life? That is very simple. Suppose you are sitting in the office and somebody scolds you. What happens? You get upset. That also happens in schools, colleges and, of course, in family life, or possibly everywhere. We always feel upset. The wife feels upset. The husband feels upset. At such moments, why don't you apply this Truth that this is an experience which is going to pass off and that which fades should never be taken seriously. You can take seriously anything which is concrete or constant. That which comes and goes is just experience which should never be taken seriously. Even if you take it seriously at that moment for one reason or another later perhaps you laugh that you were angry. Have you ever laughed at your angry reaction? That means anger swept you earlier and after some time you are looking at that anger and feel greatly amused. I give you an example of

a film première where the actors and actresses themselves go and watch themselves. Suppose a film actor has acted in a very tragic film and he goes to the première. What he does there? He lazily sips his tea perhaps and then smiles and says, 'Ah! that was the scene in which I acted best.' In the film he was seen crying but inside the movie house he was laughing, smiling, sipping tea and enjoying his own action!

Vedanta says you too can do it and do it now. You can see yourself getting angry, you can see yourself getting perturbed, you can see yourself getting amused, you can see yourself getting depressed. *Play the game or rather play the game without being the player.* Allow the play to go on. You are the screen on which the game is projected. Suppose the sequence of a tremendous fire accident is being projected on the screen. What do you do? Do you call the fire brigade or run around with a bucket of water? Or, suppose there is a flood scene. Do you have to get the drainage engineer to flush out the water? No. The moment the lights are on you see the spotless white screen which is neither wet nor burnt. Hence the great Vedanta scripture *Gītā* declares (2.23-24): '*Nainam chindanti shastrāni nainam dahati pāvakah; na chainam kledayantyāpo na shoshayati mārutah. Acchedyo'yamadāhyo'yamakledyo'shoshya eva ca; Nitya sarvagatah sthānur sanātanah*'.

These are not wishful words. This Ātman, the sword cannot cut, water cannot wet, fire cannot burn. This Ātman is constant or *shāshvata*—eternal, undying. That you are. Think about this truth. Even imagination of this gives you so much elevation! For argument's sake, even if you assume that this is sort of a hypnotization, why should we not have recourse to it if it elevates us? Unfortunately you are not doing that every day. You want to enjoy your alcohol, you want to

enjoy the movies, you want to relax with your TV serial. Why not relax with this Vedanta for a change? Even if it is for relaxation, it is a very refined, higher kind of relaxation and since it is based upon truth, its effect is going to be eternal. So think about this.

Swami Vivekananda therefore said: '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." Think on it day and night; think on it till it becomes part and parcel of your life. Meditate upon it, and out of that will come work.'

Mark the sentence! Do not think your work will go or you have to resign your job. Do not think your worldly life will be washed away. Do not think that this message will make you a confused person totally or that you cannot enter into the *samsāra*. You will do all that you have been doing, with the difference that henceforth you will do it excellently because you are *not* involved. At this stage, if somebody comes and scolds you, or says something to you which is very unreasonable, you will rejoice because you will feel you have not been insulted. Can the Ātman be insulted by anybody? That will be your attitude. I am quoting from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* where one of the rishis named Trishanku is referred to as saying: My glory is as vast as the great mountains, my glory is as vast as the ocean. Said he,

*aham vrikshasya rerivā / kirtih  
prishtham gireriva / urdhapavitra: vājini iva  
su amritam asmi / (1.10)*

So what anybody can do to me? Suppose you go to the ocean and then say, 'Oh, I don't like you' and then throw some dirty water into it, what will the ocean do? It will simply

wash it away and smile and continue to roar. You cannot do it. You think it is too high an ideal for us. But Vivekananda said it is not too high an ideal.

Of course, Vedanta preaches the ideal and the ideal, as we know, is always above our mundane day-to-day life. But then, there are two tendencies in human nature. One is to harmonize the ideal with life and the other is to elevate the life to the ideal. This is a very important observation made by Swamiji. Every human being has these two tendencies. One is to harmonize the ideal with the life. That is, somehow you try to adjust and compromise your life in such a way that you imagine that your life reflects the ideal. The other is to elevate the life to the ideal. What does it mean? It means you find the Divine being. If I am birthless and deathless, if I am constant, eternal and undying, I should behave in my daily life in such a way that this ideal will be reflected in every way.

I will give you a simple example. Swami Turiyanandaji was a great monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was practising Vedanta since his youth and trying to realize this ideal through every action of his life. One day he went for his bath in the Ganges. Suddenly he saw a crocodile and felt terribly afraid. Then he said to himself, 'No, I am a Divine being, fearless and deathless. Why should I be afraid of a crocodile? But even then he was trying to take his bath very fast. See the usual human tendency! Then he reexamined his action and pondered: Why should I take my bath so fast? I should take my bath as usual and conquer fear.

I shall give you also a very recent example from the life of Swami Abhayanandaji Maharaj (Bharat Maharaj). Most of you must have heard his name and many of you had the good fortune of having his *darshan*. We also had the good fortune of sitting at his feet. I tell you an incident of his life which is

recorded. Swami Ashokananda was a very dear friend of Swami Abhayananda. Gargi (Marie Louise Burke) records this in the life of Swami Ashokananda. Swami Abhayananda himself told this to Swami Ashokananda and the latter had in turn narrated it to Gargi. According to Gargi, Abhayanandaji along with somebody was going to a forest in Mayavati. The forest was very dense in those days. Suddenly Abhayanandaji saw a full-grown tiger standing in front of them. The eyes of the tiger had the brightness of a powerful torchlight. Abhayanandaji stood there motionless and looked straight into the eyes of the ferocious mammal because he was a great Advaitin, a practising Advaitin, not a theoretical Advaitin like us. I am talking about all this. But suppose I face a small cobra I will run away! We talk about all this, but when we face the slightest problem, either in the household or elsewhere, immediately we run away. But Swami Abhayananda reminded himself: If I am the deathless Self, who is fearless and absolutely pure—*nitya, shuddha, mukta svabhāva*—the tiger is made of the same stuff. The same Ātman is present everywhere!

So he stood there and looked at the tiger. Imagine the situation! Swami Abhayananda looking at the tiger and the tiger also looking at him in a dense forest! Then, do you know what the Swami did? He wanted to test himself. He wanted to see if his heart was beating faster than usual or not. He removed his shirt, put his hand on the heart and felt its rhythm for a few minutes. What did he find? No, the heart was not beating faster. Its rhythm was normal. So, you see, he was really Abhayananda, ie one who has conquered fear.

How was it possible? It was possible because he could elevate his life to the ideal. It is a great thing to understand this, for the other tendency, to harmonize the ideal with the life, is the temptation of our lives. The tendency to harmonize the ideal with the life means making endless compromise. Swamiji said about Great Buddha who was sitting in meditation under the banyan tree and the *māra* was tempting him in every way possible. But Buddha braved all temptations and refused to go back to the life of fraud, calling things by wrong names, constantly telling lies to himself and others. So he refused to go back to that life and eventually conquered death.

So we must refuse to compromise and elevate our lives to the ideal. We believe that it is the duty of every soul to treat others as gods. We must not hate or despise others and try to injure them in any manner. This is not only the duty of the sannyasins but of the whole human race. If I feel I am the Divine, I am the Supreme Being, I am God Himself, then you are also God; you cannot be the Devil. If I am God, you also are God. Then gods will behave with gods in a very godly manner. The whole life will then change. The attitudes will change. Your everyday actions will change. Try this and see how it changes. I tell you, my friends, this Vedantic truth has been repeatedly experimented, proved, documented and lived for thousands of years by innumerable people in our country. Now Swami Vivekananda has come to revive this old tradition and to prove that this Vedanta can be lived not only in the caves of the Himalayas but even in our modern metropolis such as Calcutta, Chennai, Tokyo or New York. ■

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