

Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda – by Sadguru Sri Nannagaru

(This video is to commemorate the 150th birthday celebrations of Swami Vivekananda. This video is an attempt to present an English version of the speech of Sadguru Sri Nannagaru delivered on January 12, 1986 which is the birthday of Swami Vivekananda according to the English calendar.)

Vivekananda is referred as Swamiji in the Ramakrishna culture. Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Bhagwan Ramana are all spiritual doctors. This is because they understand the faults within us and try to remove them. One cannot realize the Self, which is our true nature, until and unless we are faultless. In order to take us towards the goal of self realisation, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda incarnated on this earth.

A divine light in the form of a child clung around the neck of one of the saptarishis (seven great sages). When the sage asked why the child was clinging to him? The diving child replied: "I am going to the earth on a divine mission. As I am alone, I need your help in the mission. Will you accompany me to help me in my work?" The great sage agreed to come to the earth.

Then the divine child incarnated as Sri Ramakrishna in Kamarpkur and the great sage as Narendranath in the family of Vishwanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi on January 12, 1863 in Calcutta. The plan to come to the earth was made even before taking birth as humans on earth. The relationship between the Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is just not limited to this earth, but the bond existed much beyond this.

Narendranath met Sri Ramakrishna at the age of 19. Once Narendra's English lecturer was teaching a poem of William Wordsworth.

The lecturer said: "When the mind and intellect of a person are totally purified, he attains a great state called Samadhi, which is described as 'The Kingdom of Heaven' by the Christians, 'The Nirvana' by the Buddhists and 'Moksha/Liberation' by the Hindus. Do not consider this to be poetry or imagination of Wordsworth. You may think



that the Purest of the Pure might have existed in the ancient era only and not in this modern era. But there is a village called Dakshineshwar, very near to Calcutta. It is the residence of a sage called Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who has attained the same state of Samadhi as described by Wordsworth. Therefore, if you want to see a person who has attained the state of Samadhi as described by Wordsworth, you can visit Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. ”

Prior to listening to Wordsworth's poem, Narendra was greatly influenced by Brahma Samaj. He felt the Brahma Samaj's philosophy to be dry and craved for experience. Therefore, he used to visit various great persons and ask them this question: “ Have you seen God? Can you show Him to me?”. The great persons were startled with this question. When Devendranath Tagore, father of Ravindranath Tagore, was asked the same question, he said “I cannot show you God. But when I look into your eyes, you seem to be a great Yogi for me.”

Since Narendra was an agnostic (neither a theist nor an atheist), he considered Devendranath Tagore as a lunatic.

After listening to Wordsworth's poem, Narendra did not visit Sri Ramakrishna immediately.

Sri Ramakrishna used to visit the houses of devotees who invited him. One day Sri Ramakrishna visited a devotee's house in the same street where Narendra resided. Narendra was a very good singer. As Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of songs, the devotee invited Narendra to sing. Narendra sang songs of Soordas. Sri Ramakrishna looked intensely towards Narendra. Before dispersing, Sri Ramakrishna took a promise from Narendra that he would visit Dakshineshwar.

Very shortly after this incident, Narendra came to Dakshineshwar along with his friends. As there was no privacy in the room, Sri Ramakrishna caught Narendra's hands and led him into one of the inner rooms. Sri Ramakrishna said: “Naren! Until now only worldly people have been visiting me to fulfill their worldly desires. Can the worldly people ever understand the essence of Truth? I have become deaf in listening to these worldly talks. At last today, I see a devotee who is ready to surrender his life for the welfare of humanity in the form of Narendra. There is a difference between material wealth and spiritual wealth. Mangoes made of wood resemble material wealth whereas the true mangoes represent spiritual wealth. Today, somebody who deserves to inherit my spiritual wealth has come to me. Therefore, I am very happy. ”

When they came out, Sri Ramakrishna was unable to control his intense love flowing out from the depths of his heart for Naren. He wanted to feed him with some sweets

with his own hands. However, Naren refused to eat until and unless others also were fed with sweets. Narendra left after being fed.

After a month or so, Naren made his third visit to Sri Ramakrishna, who was then seated on a bed. When Naren was about to sit on the floor, Sri Ramakrishna objected for the same and wanted Naren to sit beside him on the bed. By a mere touch with his right foot, Sri Ramakrishna imparted spiritual energy into Narendra. Narendra had a divine experience and started shouting:

“What are you doing to me? My hands and legs are not visible. This world is not visible anymore. I have my parents and brothers at home. I am very frightened.”

Then Sri Ramakrishna said, “This is enough for the time being.”

Narendra was a great doubter. He always said even the Guru shouldn't be believed blindly. Therefore, he even tested Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna never discouraged Narendra; rather He said: “As one thoroughly examines the tail, legs and eyes of a calf before purchasing the same, even you can test me thoroughly before accepting me as your Guru.”

Sri Ramakrishna never touched money. Narendra, in order to test Sri Ramakrishna, put one rupee coin under his sheet on the cot. When Sri Ramakrishna sat he felt as if he was bitten by a scorpion and stood up immediately.

Narendra was ashamed for doubting his Guru. Then Sri Ramakrishna consoled him saying that he can test him in as many ways as he wants.

A Sadguru knows in advance the work allotted to each of his disciples. When Narendra tried to write down the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna stopped him saying: “Naren! You haven't come for this work. You have a different work to do.” It was Mahendranath Gupta, who was destined to carry out that work. He wrote a book by name ‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’. It is the essence of all the scriptures. In other words, it can be called as ‘The Modern Bhagawad Gita’.

Narendra belonged to a rich family, was handsome with a sweet voice and was studying law. He was therefore getting many good proposals for marriage. When Sri Ramakrishna was informed about the same, he said: “When a girl to marry Naren did not even take birth on this earth, how can Naren get married?”

There were also some proposals to send Narendra to England for further studies after marriage. However, Narendra rejected all of them saying: “Where there is Kama, there is no Rama and where there is Rama there is no Kama.”

Narendra used to angry very easily. In the fit of anger he would even break chairs and tables. His mother, Bhuneshwari Devi, used to calm him down by pouring cold water on his head while chanting the name of Lord Shiva. One day Narendra was so angry that he abused his Mother. Narendra's father, Vishwanath Dutta did not reprimand him for this action. Rather he wrote on the wall, the list of abuses that Narendra made against his Mother. When Narendra arrived along with his friends and saw the list of abuses, he felt greatly ashamed and repented for his wrong act. The next day, Narendra approached his father and asked him to give him an instruction which he would not like to forget throughout his life. Then Vishwanath Dutta said, "Whatever incident may happen in this world, don't ever get surprised or don't react."

When Narendra was in the second year of his bachelor's course his father expired. When Narendra's mother asked him if he would like to continue with his studies, he



replied: "I am fit neither for the studies nor for the worldly activities. I am born not to die but to do great things in the world."

Narendra suffered from acute poverty after his father's death. He used to lie to his Mother that he finished his lunch at a friend's house so that His Mother can have the little food available at home. In spite of such acute poverty, his faith in God or his Guru never declined.

All of us are great devotees when everything happens as intended (that is when you get your coffee and food on time). One needs to display his mettle in testing times.

Vivekananda was a born teacher and a born saint. When Sri Ramakrishna suggested Narendra to pray to Mother Kali for food and clothing, he prayed thus:

"Mother! Keep my mind away from lust, anger and gold." When Sri Ramakrishna chided him as to why he did not pray for food and clothing, Narendra replied :

"On looking at Mother's face, I didn't feel like asking her to satisfy my material needs. I could not ask her anything else, except purity of mind. I am sorry for I could not ask Mother as suggested by you."

Then Sri Ramakrishna said, "Leave about Mother. I assure you that your family will never suffer from shortage of food and clothing."

In 1886, Sri Ramakrishna was diagnosed with throat cancer. On one end, though Narendra was serving Sri Ramakrishna and on the other end, looking at his intense suffering, Narendra thought: "Is it my delusion to consider Sri Ramakrishna as God Himself, a great Guru and a great Mahatma?" Sri Ramakrishna read the thoughts of Narendra and said: "Oh! Naren! One who is Lord Rama, One who is Lord Krishna, is this Ramakrishna. Today I become a beggar giving you all my spiritual strength. Take up the responsibility of looking after your brother disciples."

Sri Ramakrishna attained Mahanirvana on August 16, 1886.

Swamiji felt guilty that the body of a great saint like Sri Ramakrishna was burnt in an ordinary burial ground. He felt that until and unless a temple was built in the memory of Sri Ramakrishna, he could not be unburdened from this guilt. Therefore, Swamiji built Belur Math with grants received from various devotees in America. He placed the ashes of Ramakrishna in it.

After the Mahanirvana of Sri Ramakrishna, all brother disciples got scattered. There was no financial support even from the householder disciples. Swamiji brought them back together and started a monastery in Baranagore. He wandered throughout India and was moved at plight of India's poverty. Swamiji said:

"How can you preach religion to the one suffering from the pangs of hunger?" He decided to dedicate the rest of his life for the upliftment of India.

The message of Vivekananda to India is:

"Whatever you do, do it fearlessly. Be Fearless. Be Fearless. Be Fearless."

It is not enough if you have faith in God. First you need to have faith in yourselves before having faith in God.

Oh! Mankind, have muscles made of iron and nerves of steel. When you lack physical and mental health, how can you play volley ball or foot ball or read the Bhagawad Gita?

What you first need is courage. Even if you are opposed by the entire world cling to your ideal.

If you want God and God alone, kick this world mercilessly. You can make any amount of sacrifice or even face death for the sake of your ideal.

The Truth/Self is not revealed to the weak, lazy and timid.

The Parliament of Religions was held on September 12, 1898 in Chicago. The people of Madras financed Swamiji to attend the same. But Swamiji became penniless and also lost his letter of introduction by the time he reached Chicago. However, a generous lady helped Swamiji with good clothes and a letter of introduction and ensured that Swamiji attended the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji was seated on the stage and was to address a huge crowd. When the name of Swamiji was called out, he felt frightened to talk as he never addressed such a huge crowd. So he sat back in his chair. When his name was called out for the second time, He said he would talk later. The President convening the Parliament of Religions

discovered the fear of Swamiji and called out his name again telling him that he will not be given another chance. Therefore Swamiji, full of fear, came out to speak.

It is the tradition of America to address the people as 'Ladies and Gentlemen'. All the speakers at the conference followed the same tradition of addressing the audience. However Swamiji addressed the gathering as 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. There was a great applause in return. People stood up and clapped for a long time. This gave Swamiji an immense confidence to speak.

The following is the essence of the Speech in Chicago:

"Once a frog from an ocean visited a frog in a well. The frog in the well asked the visitor, how big is the ocean? Is it as big as this well? All of us represent the frog in a well. All of us think that it is only our religion that can take us to the destination. Without realizing the Truth, we only consider our path and our religion to be great. This attitude of ours only represents the frog in a well."

Swamiji, a penniless monk, a wandering monk, an unknown monk became world famous within an hour through his address at Chicago. This is the glory of Guru.

The next day the newspapers described him as 'The Cyclonic Monk'. When the Press at America recognized Swamiji, the Indian Press also started showering praises on him. Swamiji conducted classes in America for a year and collected a lot of funds.

Comparing the luxury and wealth of America with the poverty of India, Swamiji used to cry till late night. One of the friends of Swamiji said, "Why do you want to return back to that poor India? Why don't you settle down in America itself?" Swamiji replied: 'The soil of India is my highest heaven.'

Unable to pronounce the name of Vivekananda, some Westerners used to call him as Ananada. Then Swamiji used to ask back: "Do you want only Bliss i e Ananda? Don't you want discrimination i e Viveka?

Swamiji used to write letters to his brother monks:

"God resides not only in temple but resides in every jiva (body). Therefore worship Jiva as Shiva Himself. The Hindu religion, which is tainted with superstitions and untouchability must be reformed. We must dedicate our lives for the upliftment of India in the name of Sri Ramakrishna."

When Swamiji was honored on his return to India, he said, "Am I not the same boy, Narendra who wandered in the streets of Calcutta? Why do you want to honor me specially? Is it just because the people of America honored me that you want to do the same? "

Some people are very rich but never utilise it for others.

Swamiji used to write letters to his Madras friends. In these letters he would refer to such rich people as crying faces. Swamiji said: "My behaviour towards you is cruel so that you may be reformed. I speak harshly so that you may enjoy the Bliss in future."

Jawaharlal Nehru mentions in his book ‘The Discovery of India’:“When India was fast asleep and West was making a tremendous progress, it was Swami Vivekananda who awakened India.”

Rabindranath Tagore said: “In Swamiji, everything is Positive.”

After returning from America, all his brother monks met Swamiji except Swami Adbutananda also known as Latu Maharaj. Swamiji searched for him and found him in the crowd. When Swamiji called him near and asked him why he stayed so far, Latu said, “As you attained name and fame, I thought you might have forgotten me.” Swamiji replied: “You are my Latu and I am your Naren.”

Swamiji had great self respect. Once when Swamiji was travelling by a train in America, there were no other co-passengers except for an American. He hated black people and hence threw out the coat of



Swamiji when Swamiji was asleep. When Swamiji searched for his coat and could not find the same, he understood that to be the mischief of that American. When the American was pretending to be asleep, Swamiji slowly threw out his shoes. When the American asked Swamiji about his shoes, Swamiji replied: “Your shoes went out in search of my coat.”

In his childhood, once Swamiji was carrying back home a photo of God. He saw an old woman who fainted on the road due to sunstroke. Swamiji immediately kept aside the photo and tried to serve her. Someone on the road shouted that Swamiji incurred sin by placing God’s photo on the road. Swamiji replied: “What you are referring to is only an image of God, whereas I am serving a living God.”

An American lady bought the land required to build Belur Math. Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission were established. The Math trains the monastic disciples and the Mission carries out several service oriented

activities. It is only due to the strength of Swamiji’s will that Ramakrishna Mission today runs numerous schools and hospitals and serves the nation at the time of natural calamities.

After establishing the Belur Math, Swamiji said, “Currently all the assets are in my name. It is better that a Trust be formed so that my family members cannot claim the same after my death.” Swamiji suggested a committee be formed. The brother monks suggested that Swamiji should become the first

president. However, Swamiji out rightly rejected this proposition. When the monks wanted Swamiji to suggest a name for President, Swamiji said, "If you are so inefficient and incapable that you can't even elect a President, Secretary and a Treasurer, how can I expect you to serve the nation?" Then Swami Brahmananda was elected as the first president of the Ramakrishna Math. Sri Ramakrishna referred to Swami Brahmananda as his spiritual son. Sri Ramakrishna described him as one of the companions of Sri Krishna in Brindavan. Swami Sharadananda was elected as the Secretary. Swami Sharadananda took the name of Holy Mother Sharada Devi. The Holy Mother was so fond of Sharadananda that she wanted him to light her funeral pyre. When Sharadananda asked for final instructions, Holy Mother said, " Tolerance, Tolerance, Tolerance."

In his last days, Swamiji went to the West for the second time. After his return, there was a change in his outlook. He observed that in spite of the luxury, people in the West had secret burdens as they were disturbed in their hearts. Wealth is required but cannot be made the goal of life. Only Self Realisation and Truth realization should be made the goal of life.

Swamiji says, "When you visit a temple, you consider it as worship to the Lord. However when you serve the poor, why do you consider it as a service and not as a worship? Isn't the same Lord in the form of Man, Isn't the same Lord in the form of Poor? "

Swamiji said, "Him I call a Mahatma, whose heart bleeds for the poor." Only he who suffered from starvation can understand the pangs of hunger. You cannot understand the same by mere book reading. When you are suffering from a stomach upset, how can you understand the pain of hunger? When there was a famine in Calcutta, Swamiji was ready to sell off Ramakrishna Math to serve the poor. Inner intention is more important than the external activity. Therefore Swamiji is called 'The friend of poor'.

Swamiji said, "I will never see my 40." Even Sri Ramakrishna said, "Naren! Don't ever think that you will see your 40." Swamiji left his mortal body on July 4, 1902. He had high blood pressure. Swamiji said, "I am kicked like a foot ball from one place to another."

On July 4, 1902, Swamiji took the Sanskrit class and went for a walk on the banks of Ganges. During his walk he asked his co-disciple, "Vivekananda has come into this world. What did Vivekananda do?" The co-disciple did not answer him. Then Swamiji himself replied, "Can everyone understand what this Vivekananda has done? It requires the advent of another Vivekananda to understand the same. In the coming future many other Vivekanandas are about to take birth. Even if you don't understand, at least they will understand the work of this Vivekananda."

Swamiji came back from the walk, locked himself in his room and slept peacefully. He went into a deep meditation. As he breathed his last, a little blood came out of his mouth.

Swamiji utilized his intellect, strength, power and fame only for the sake of India. There is no field that is not influenced by Swamiji irrespective of whether it is the economical, social or political. Even our freedom fighters proclaimed that they participated in the freedom struggle only after understanding and digesting the words of Swamiji.

Swamiji was not interested to become the president or the secretary of Ramakrishna Mission. He suggested his brother monks to take up those positions. When the person to sweep and clean was absent he would himself sweep.

A musical troupe was appointed to perform during the installation of Sri Ramakrishna's idol. However, the troupe did not reach the place on time. Those present at ceremony were feeling shy to sing. Swamiji chided them asking why should anyone feel shy to sing at the installation of their Guru's idol? Stating thus, the world famous Swamiji himself conducted the musical programme. If we get a small honor we hesitate in doing trivial works. However, Swamiji never hesitated in doing so called trivial works.

Swamiji used to say, "When so many people are illiterate and hungry, where do I have the time to think of my own liberation?"

Once, Rajagopalachari was showing the rooms in his college to Swamiji. There was a portrait of Lord Krishna in one of the rooms. Looking at the same, Swamiji posed the question to Rajaji: " Why is Krishna blue in color?" Rajaji, a great intellect, replied: "Since the sky which is infinite is blue in color, even Lord Krishna is infinite and hence is blue in color." Swamiji blessed Rajaji that he would become one of the important personalities of India in future.

Being greatly inspired by the speech of Swamiji, Swami Ramatirtha removed his watch and offered the same to Swamiji. Swamiji gently put back the watch into Ramatirtha's pocket and said: "It is my watch only but I would like to save it in your pocket."

When the newspapers praised Swamiji in their editorials, Swamiji said, "The newspapers are all nonsense."

Swamiji said, "God is not separate from this society. Therefore think of this society. Forgetting yourselves melt down for the sake of society. Work without ego and sense of doer ship. Offer the fruit of your actions to God. Later the nation will experience the fruit of your action."

Vivekananda said, "I do not want liberation. I am ready to take rebirth even a thousand times to get rid of the hunger of a dog in India." He is Vivekananda.

Who is this Vivekananda? He is the one, who, if required, is ready to sell his flesh, blood and bones (not just money) in the market and serve the society.

Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Swamiji, "How will you react if anyone criticizes you?" Swamiji replied: "I will consider all such critics as barking dogs." Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do not be so harsh. If you speak thus, you may become egoistic. Rather than criticizing your critics, you stop noticing them."

Vivekananda was to become a great teacher in future. Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna trained him in expressing himself.

When someone asked Swamiji, "Why do you call Sri Ramakrishna, a great Master? Isn't he an illiterate, who doesn't even know how to sign? Isn't it true, that only because you are preaching his message, that his name is being spread in all directions?"

Swamiji replied: "He is Sri Ramakrishna, who by a mere thought can produce a 1000 Vivekanandas like the one you adore."

These are the immortal words of Vivekananda:

An aimless life is a miserable life and on the quality of your aim depends on the quality of your life.

Go forward, March forward, Look forward; do not look back.

Look at the ocean and not at the wave.

Swamiji's favorite quote in the Gita: " Kshudram Hrudaya Dourbhalyam." There is nothing meaner than the timidity of the heart. It is only due to fear that you commit mistakes. It is only due to fear that you get death. Every negative occurrences in the society is only due to fear. Therefore be fearless.

Live for the sake of the Ideal and die for the sake of the Ideal. Don't live looking at yourselves from the eyes of others. The dogs may bark on looking at the sky.

Currently what India needs is neither Sattava nor tamas. What India currently needs is rajas. In India People may look sattvic externally but are tamasic within.

Do not have friends who are petty minded as they crave for name and fame. If you serve the society selflessly, the liberation will adorn you automatically.

My religion is not Hinduism. The essence of my religion is Strength. If you are not physically and mentally strong, how can you experience the Truth?

You will always have someone to criticize you in this world, however good your work may be. This world resembles the tail of a dog and can never be reformed.

You are not a sinner. He is a sinner who calls you a sinner. You are all the sons of Immortality. There are no such words called sin and fear in my dictionary.

Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached. For how many births do you want to remain in this sleep of ignorance? After you started your journey towards God, how much ever nearest or dearest tendencies may call you back, do not look behind but March forward. Oh! My Mind get back to your source.

Can we ever redeem the debt of Swami Vivekananda who was a great writer, teacher, orator, social reformer, saint, a patriot of patriots, maker of modern India, the cyclonic monk, and the friend of the poor, an idealist as well as a realist and a Lover of Humanity?

Courtesy : Ambica Udaynarayan