

Swami Girishananda

(Revered Swami Girishananda is the manager, trustee and treasurer of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur Math. As a part of the 40th year celebrations of Vidyapith, Swamis Girishananda and Devapriyananada were invited to visit Vivekananda Vidyapith on Monday, November 16, 2016. Swami Girishananda spoke about the essence of the Upanishads. The following writeup has been prepared for publication from a video recording of Swamiji's lecture.)

Swami Devapriyanandaji Maharaj, our Professor Mahendra Jani, Mrs. Jani, all venerable teachers of Vidyapith, devotees and my beloved students – today is a very happy occasion that I can come and meet all of you and discuss not only spiritual matters, but also the workings of those spiritual matters in our daily life. First of all, I would like to convey my heartfelt gratefulness to Mr. Jani and all of you who are present here who contributed in our work at Belur Math, Headquarters of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, in building a big dining hall for the general public. Last time when I came, it was holiday time, and we only had a few students. This time I see the happy faces of the Vidyapith students, the teachers and guardians, and all others who are connected with Vidyapith and the noble work that you are doing.

Swamiji's vision of ideal education is imparted through this institution. Swamiji's vision of education is, "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man." The main interpretation of this definition is that there are immense possibilities of perfection inside the human being. One can attain perfection to any degree. Education is the only way of attaining that perfection. Swami Vivekananda said that education is the panacea of all evils. So what kind of education do you think he wants to impart to youngsters and elders? No one should think that 'my education is over.' Ramakrishna said, "as long as we live, so long do we learn." There is no end of our education. It is good to start education from the childhood days; but if the education was not given then, it can be given in the adult age also. Education gives immense possibilities for perfection.

Swami Vivekananda repeatedly said that education is to make a man grow. That manifestation of perfection can come from the balanced development of the body, the mind, the intellect, and above all, of the Self. The Self is beyond this body-mind complex. This is connected with religion. A question was asked as to how religion and education are connected. For a common mind it appears as though religion and education are not connected. That is a pseudo religion, because religion is the manifestation of divinity. At the same time we should remember that the manifestation of divinity is the development of Self-hood. Education in its early stage helps with the development of body and mind, and then it will help in the development of the intellect. At later stages education helps with the development of Self, which is also known as 'religion.' Manifestation of perfection leads to the manifestation of divinity. Suppose we ignore manifestation of divinity and give all importance to manifestation of perfection. A machine is a perfect thing. It can do hundreds of things. In your small capacity, you give orders to the robot, and the robot will obey all your commands. A robot can clean the house and can also do many difficult works like taking us to the moon and walking on the moon. Is it enough that we receive the services of robots, and our development is completely finished? The development of a robot is a mechanical matter. We develop the mind and intellect with the help of the robot. But who will guide the robot? What should be the condition of the mind who conducts the robot? The good qualities and the noble values like unselfishness, love, fraternity and others that man has developed within himself, cannot be cultivated in the robot.

When Swami Vivekananda was asked how he looks at religion and education, he said, "I see religion as the innermost core of education." Think of it deeply, and we will find its meaning. Why did he say that religion is the innermost core of education? Because when a man manifests the divinity lying within through religion, he is the most educated man. He may not have book-learning. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother did not have book-learning education, but today people all over the world sit at their feet to get *proper* education. Swami Vivekananda imparted this proper education to the world. Swami Vivekananda bowed down his head at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna to understand the inner core or true meaning of religion;

that is the divinity lying within. He had doubts. He asked all the notable people of Kolkata, "Sir! Have you seen God?" Do you think all the notable people of Kolkata of that time were not educated? They were highly educated and were intellectuals of that time. They had full knowledge of Western education. As Western civilization was flourishing at that time, they were well-versed in science and technology. But, they could not answer Swami Vivekananda's question. Swami Vivekananda had a doubt in his mind whether all the knowledge, research and analysis of the Rishis of Upanishads were correct. Did all the people who followed the teachings of these Seers going in the wrong direction? His education was creating the confusion. At that time Swami Vivekananda was thinking, where is that soul, that particular glittering star, the sun that dispels all the darkness, doubts, and ignorance. The question was not just to save India from the doubts and confusion, but it was for the whole world. Human beings are same. They are made out of the same compositions.

We are thinking of the value education which is imparted in Vivekananda Vidyapith in an intensive way. This education is based upon Swami Vivekananda's definition of education, namely "Man-making, "Character Building" and "Assimilation of ideas." These are three important corner stones of education. So, education and religion are very closely related to each other. It does not depend on what kind of education it is. As in the education of the outer world we learn through many subjects, so in the religion we learn many subjects of the inner world, the world of mind. Sri Ramakrishna did many experiments and had many visions. If we study Sri Ramakrishna's life we can learn what is there in the inner recess of our minds. The inner world is not smaller than the outer world. It was declared in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, "Inside and outside, everything is covered by the Lord Narayana." God dwells in our schools, streets, factories, shops, and everywhere. Search for this Lord within and we will find that there is a great treasure lying within. Many of our questions will be answered if we look within.

When we search our own hearts, we can find the immense treasures within our soul that strengthen our faith and give answers to revealing and existential questions like, "Does God exist?" or "How can we see God?". With our open eyes, we see all of the external or material things, but we cannot see God. With our eyes open, we cannot see the Reality lying

within. Sri Ramakrishna was asked the following question: “We do not see God. So does God really exist?” He answered by asking a counter question, “You do not see the stars in the sky during daylight. Can you then conclude that the stars do not exist?” Even though Sri Ramakrishna was from a village and not even properly clothed from society’s point of view, he was very logical in giving answers to his devotees’ questions. His answers were so profound and clear that all of his devotees’ doubts and confusions were dispelled. Several elite scholars from Kolkata and other provinces even came to Sri Ramakrishna with a resolve to suppress his teachings by asking him difficult questions. They thought that Sri Ramakrishna was a simple priest, that he only knew a few mantras and had no better knowledge than them. But when they came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna, they were all mesmerized by his sound reasoning and thorough understanding of the divine. On the contrary, it was Sri Ramakrishna who used to ask them: “Do you have any question?”, “Are you satisfied with your path?”, “Do you have any higher goal in your life?” During these conversations, it was revealed that these same elites were not clear about their paths, their goals in life, or their faith in their own beliefs. Sri Ramakrishna’s parlor was open to all people. He did not exclude anyone. He answered all questions with great conviction, and his answers were eye-opening to the future of humanity at-large.

The universal vision of Sri Ramakrishna has and will continue to have an impact on all humanity. There is a lot of misinterpretation of spiritual thinking and morality in our current society. There are many questions, doubts, and lots of confusion. Morality cannot stand without the basis of spirituality, and I am sure you will agree with that. Swamiji very nicely elaborated on this subject when he asked, “If I benefit by hurting or robbing my neighbors, why should I not do it?” If we delve deeper on this subject, we can understand Swamiji’s message. Swamiji says the ultimate spiritual truth that “we are all one as our soul” is the fundamental reason for not hurting others. He says that by hurting others, we are only hurting ourselves.

Cherishing this thought that “the same Self lying in me is being reflected in all beings” makes a person noble. We are all One. That is the truth of non-duality. It is called “Advaitavada”. Bhagavan Sri Shankaracharya repeated this truth again and again. This truth of non-duality has been proclaimed in the Upanishads and many other scriptures. It says that

there is no duality in the universe. We perceive duality in the universe to be apparent. We accept this apparent duality. But the word “apparent” suggests that it *looks* like true, but it is *not* true. The truth is that there is only one Reality - Brahman. It appears in different forms and has been labeled by different names. Brahman, the Unity of Existence, is covered with a veil of ignorance through names and forms, resulting in what we see as the duality in the universe.

Jesus said, “I and my father are one.” How can a father and son be one? Here, Jesus is talking of non-duality. This same fact was told thousands of years earlier in the Hindu scriptures: “Jiva Brahmaiva Naaparah.” A being is not different from the Brahman.” The Upanishads also say, “Aham Brahmasmi.” “I am Brahman.” This means that “my true nature is Brahman.” The Upanishads state that a person is not his/her body, mind, or intelligence. In Reality, a person is nothing but Brahman, and the body, mind, and intelligence are only its instruments.

Now, we all see differences in human beings. People have different kinds of bodies, in shape and color. People have different kinds of minds and levels of intelligence. So then, how do we see the one Reality behind this multiplicity? We have to surpass the duality, the body-mind complex. We have to surpass these modifications projected in the names and forms that are solely in our minds. To attain knowledge in the external world, we use our body, mind, and intelligence as our instruments. Similarly, to attain knowledge of the internal world, we have to use the same instruments - our body, mind, and intelligence. If we use these instruments in the inner world and go deeper within, we will find the ultimate truth. We must have faith in the scriptures. Shri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, “Shraddhavan labhate jnanam.” “A person with faith acquires the highest knowledge.”

The first condition in spiritual education is having faith in the teacher. Then, we must have faith in ourselves. These two faiths bring miracles. It can change the life of a person for good and makes “a new person.” These two faiths raise a person from an animal state to a divine state. If we train our minds properly and thus surpass the body-mind complex, we can cross all the hurdles that come on the way to becoming divine. Only then do we realize that our true self is Brahman. The mind and intelligence can be trained or developed to realize this Ultimate Reality just as the body can be built up by systematic exercises. In body-building, a

person can lift weights of 5 lbs. at first, then 10 lbs., and then 15 lbs. Similarly, the mind and intelligence of a person can be developed to attain Brahma Vidya, the Knowledge of Brahman. For this, one must do systematic spiritual practices. Without practice, one cannot immediately know that one's true nature is Brahman.

Just as knowledge of the external world has been described by science in a logical and analytical way, the knowledge of the internal world has similarly been described in a logical and analytical way by the scriptures, Incarnations of God, and various prophets. In the modern times, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Saradadevi, and Swami Vivekananda have demonstrated the truths of the scriptures from their lives and have explained these truths in a scientific way.

Countries write about equality, peace, justice, fraternity, and other such things in their constitutions. But, where did these ideas come from? What is the basis of these thoughts? It is in the Oneness of Existence. It is the Ultimate Truth.

Now, there is an actual Truth and there is a shadow of the Truth. Shri Shankaracharya again and again mentioned in the Viveka Chudamani that the universe is the shadow of the Ultimate Reality, which is Brahman. He said, "Chhaya Sharire Pratibimbagatre..." He explains that when you are in a dream you imagine that the dream is true. Is the dream really true? No. When you wake up, the dream is gone. In a similar way, we imagine that things are real even though they are not. We only see a shadow and believe that it is real. When we acquire the knowledge of Oneness, then the dream of duality (the shadow of the truth) disappears.

Suppose we see a shadow of a tiger. If we think the shadow is real, we may try to fight it. But this is useless. You see your reflection in water. But, is the reflection of yourself your true identity? No, it is not your true self. Therefore, whatever we perceive through our senses is an apparent truth and not an actual truth. So what is the actual truth? "You are Brahman" is the actual truth. This truth has been told again and again in Upanishads. What scientists are discovering as truth through thousands of experiments, the Rishis have discovered by going deeper within. The Rishis found that the outside and the inside worlds are same. Everything is the manifestation of One Reality, Brahman. Scriptures say that Brahman is greater than the greatest and smaller than the smallest. We can realize this truth by controlling our mind and

searching for this truth within. The ideal education is to know this truth. One day or another we all will come to know this truth.

In order to achieve this, we must make efforts to realize this truth. We should not get frustrated in the process of learning and should not quit. It is the claim of the Upanishads that when you have a human body and a human mind - however unpolished and unprepared your mind may be, whether you are born into a poor or rich family, whether you are born into an educated or illiterate family, whether you are born into a backward or forward-thinking society - the same Brahman dwells inside you. The same Ultimate Reality Brahman manifests itself in the East, West, North, and South, above and below. Brahman is manifesting through all beings and things.

“We are the children of immortality” because when we come to know that we are one with the absolute reality (which is never changed, destroyed, annihilated, or exhausted), then we know that we are immortal. So, first try to assert to yourself that “Yes, I am That Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.” Once you realize this truth, ignorance will run away and you will feel one with Brahman. As the Upanishads say, “You are Soul - the Immortal Spirit, free, blessed and eternal.”

Sri Ramakrishna said that day and night if you think “you are a sinner”, then you will become a sinner. This kind of thinking will make you weak. Swami Vivekananda said, “It is a sin to call a man sinner. It is a standing libel on human nature. Shake off your delusion that you are a sinner”. In the western countries, Swami Vivekananda told Christians to really understand the Bible and follow Jesus Christ. In India, he said that for thousands of years, the wrong teachings of the scriptures have brought society down.

It is important to teach all how to awaken the Brahman sleeping within them. Sri Ramakrishna’s life has and will continue to make a big positive change in humanity. His example and teachings will help raise the spiritual level and noble thoughts in humanity and strengthen the idea of unity of existence. Without these noble thoughts, the weak human nature can bring devastation in the human civilization. In great wars, so many people have died. People were made to believe that there are differences in human beings, leading to all of those wars. The practice of Advaita Vedanta can save humanity from such devastating events. Swami

Vivekananda explained how Advaita Vedanta is the religion of modern humanity. Swamiji said that one can worship any god or goddess, but must know that “Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti,” – The Truth is One, the Sages call It by different names. If we follow the principles of Advaita Vedanta, the narrowness of the religion will go away and human beings will be encouraged to move towards divinity. Regardless of religious background, if any person experiments with and does spiritual practice in order to reach to this Ultimate Reality or the Unity of Existence, he/ she will be blessed. This will help humanity. If people do not do this, they will forget their holy nature. With proper training, this divinity lying within can be manifested like a flower blossoming from a bud. God has created human beings who are capable of realizing this divinity within. Through proper education, it can be achieved. Only then will all the evil tendencies go away. Evil tendencies cannot go unless we awaken the holiness within. When people realize the Oneness of Existence, they will not hurt each other. To know this highest truth, we have to first learn about it – either through reading or listening. The practice of listening to knowledgeable people about Atman and Brahman is called “Shravana”. Once this is done, we must reflect on It, which is called “Manana,” and then meditate on It, which is called “Nididhyasana.” A child’s education on the Ultimate Reality of Brahman, the learning and memorization of hymns, shlokas, or paragraphs about Brahman leaves deep impressions on the mind. Such impressions help a child practice these ideas when the child grows up and he/she will remove ignorance and evil tendencies from his/her mind. This will make him/her holy and spiritual. For this, we first need physical, mental, and intellectual strength. With the help of these strengths, spirituality can be developed within oneself and others. This is the way to improve our society. It is important that these noble thoughts are inculcated right from the childhood.

I am very happy that all of you are here. I enjoyed seeing you all. Please accept my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Jani and the whole Vidyapith family for inviting me. Thank you.