

Swami Sarvadevananda

(Revered Swami Sarvadevananda is the spiritual head of Vedanta Society of Southern California. As part of the 40th year celebrations of Vivekananda Vidyapith, Swamiji was invited to visit the Vidyapith to give a talk on November 12, 2016. Swami Sarvadevananda gave his blessings to the students, teachers, helpers and parents in the morning assembly and spoke on "Practical Vedanta" in the evening. The following writeup has been prepared for publication from a video recording of the Swamiji's lectures.)

Morning Blessing

"I am very happy to be here today standing before you all. I am very happy because particularly, I deeply respect the dedicated service of our Mahendra Uncle and Vandana Aunty and all the uncles and aunties of Vivekananda Vidyapith. Here, a beautiful project is going on. Swami Vivekananda's ideal of "man-making education" or "character building education" is in progress here. I love all the young brothers and sisters that are gathered here. You are also dedicated to this noble cause, sacrificing your time and willingly joining in this mission of developing the potential divinity which is inside all of us.

We get bread earning education everywhere. Swami Vivekananda wanted our education to be "the manifestation of perfection already in man". So what is perfection? We have infinite potential and to manifest that potential is the goal of life. In another definition of education, Swami Vivekananda called it "the manifestation of divinity in man." Swami Vivekananda spoke in front of men and that is why he addressed it as 'man,' but he meant women as well. The perfection that is in us is to be unfolded.

In schools and colleges it happens through art, science, music, technology, etc. But we have a great heritage in India of a spiritual dimension in our personal lives. Along with the education we learn from schools and colleges it is good if we can learn how to manifest that infinite divinity which is lurking within us. In schools and colleges we receive an education which gives us only a diploma. We are not focusing on the potential power and purity latent in us. Without the manifestation of divinity, education is incomplete. That is why Swami Vivekananda said that education is the panacea of all evils. We commit mistakes because we are ignorant.

So, the question is: How can we develop that power or unveil that divinity which is within us? Here there is a wonderful environment where we can unveil the divinity lying within. Here we are together taking the name of God, reciting shlokas from the Bhagavad Gita which describe characteristics of a devotee. For a few moments, we forgot the other world, thinking about our true nature. We were thinking for the good of all. Swami Vivekananda said that unselfishness is God. But the education we receive in schools makes us selfish most of the times – *my* education, *my* earning, *my* home, *my* family. The 'me' here should not be limited. Swami Vivekananda presented before us that our thinking should include everyone. He said, "You are in everyone." If everyone is happy then I am happy. If I become happy at the cost of others' suffering, that is not happiness. As you know, Swami Vivekananda defined religion or spirituality as unselfishness. He said that

the world is burning in suffering. He asked, “Do you feel the suffering of others?” He wanted us to feel the suffering of hungry people and uneducated people.

Swami Vivekananda said, “I call him a traitor who educates at the expense of these hungry people and who does not pay heed to the needs of these people.” We have to be great in life, and we should love everyone. We have to sacrifice our lives for the good of all. Swami Vivekananda said, “The national ideal of India is renunciation and service”. What is this renunciation? It is not renouncing everything and going to a cave. Renunciation is giving up selfishness. Instead of thinking of “Me and Mine” we have to think of “Thee and Thine.” A spiritual life consists of thinking of others. Swami Vivekananda said, “Only those live who live for others. All others are more dead than alive.” He wanted twenty such people who live for others. Swami Vivekananda was very hopeful for young people as our future and our hope depends on you.

I am proud to find that the Vidyapith students are truly different and more understanding of these ideas. I see them occasionally in Hollywood center. During my lecture I see them sitting in the audience and listening intently. I have noticed that they are different. Then, I find out that they are from Vivekananda Vidyapith. It makes my heart filled with joy to see that they are receiving this kind of education, the education that we want. I am sure the students of Vidyapith are more focused, so they will do well in their study and profession. But, it is great that in addition to that you are getting moral and spiritual education, learning to think about others and to do good to all by sacrificing this little ‘self.’ Swami Vivekananda sacrificed his life to rouse the awareness of the potential divinity in all and feel the Oneness.

He asked, “Why should we do good to others?” Because, there is no “other.” Holy Mother said, “My child, make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger my child.” Can you feel that someone is your brother and sister? It does not cost anything to go and help the other person. If I think that, that person is a stranger, then I don’t have any motivation to help him. But, there is no one who is a stranger. This is Vedantist Philosophy. Swami Vivekananda asked us feel that we are part of the whole. You cannot live alone. You have to live with others and sacrifice for others. Swami Vivekananda said, ‘The world is burning in misery. Can you sleep? The bravest children of the world are they who can dedicate their life for the good of others.’

So I am extremely happy to be with you. Here your inner divinity has been blossoming from a bud to a flower. Later on this blossoming will help better our society. To live an exemplary life is more important than talks and lectures. It is a great opportunity to implement the values you are learning here in your life. You can build up your life and thus help society. When you grow up, give these ideals to society. Thus, the next generation will understand this Vedantist Philosophy of Oneness, the spiritual life for which you are standing. It is wonderful to see that here you get the opportunity to sit for some time and concentrate.

About education Swami Vivekananda said, ‘If I have anything to say in the field of education, I will tell them that in the beginning not to teach Physics, Chemistry or Math, but teach students how to concentrate.’ That concentration is power. Wherever you utilize that concentration power in your study, the secret of the subject matter will unfold. This is another opportunity Vidyapith gives all of you, to concentrate your mind and to put it in the proper direction.

I pray for the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda that this Vidyapith flourishes more and more and brings out more brothers and sisters like you. You should have many branches. Responsibility is upon you now. Mahendra Uncle and Vandana Aunty have started this institution with the good hope and inspiration of Swami Adiswarananda. Now you are growing up and you have to build up your own spiritual muscles, moral strength and power, get proper education that allows you to stand on your own moral and spiritual dignity. It is wonderful to see that an institute like Vidyapith has completed 40 years and produced so many wonderful people of character. It is a glory of Vidyapith. It is a blessing to the society and to the individuals. I pray for joy, peace, and spiritual growth of all of you. Jai Maa.”