

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.)

Practical Vedanta

"Dear and most revered Dr. Jani, our own Uncle! Holy Mother used to say Uncle Moon is everyone's Uncle. There is Aunt. There are so many dedicated teachers, students and devotees present here. My loving regards to all of you and Swami Atmajnanananda also. I am very privileged to be here on the completion of 40 years of Vivekananda Vidyapith. What a tremendous dedication and sacrifice has gone into it. We all know that to have great success in this world we have to give up our own selfish identity and work relentlessly to reach the goal. We find such fruition here. It really thrills our heart to see such wonderful manifestation of an opportune area where our future generation can come and build up their lives.

You have heard a big introduction about me. I do not know how someone came up with it. But as we say we are proud to belong to the holiest of the holy, Ramakrishna Math. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are connected. They are embodiments of spirituality. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission is the concrete defined form of the essence of all spiritual traditions. What a great tradition and what a fortune to belong to. It is a great opportunity not just to see how they lived, but how people lived under their guidance. They have continued that tradition of realization. That is why this organization is called a research institute, namely Brahma Vidya Research Institute. We are all researchers to find Brahman.

Ramakrishna is called the embodiment of the Vedas. Swami Vivekananda has defined Sri Ramakrishna as 'Veda Murthy.' As you all know, Vedas are the books of wisdom. Each has two segments, Karma Kanda and Jnana Kanda. In Ramakrishna we can find all these combinations, from Karma to the end of Karma and beyond, which is an inexplicable Reality. At any moment he could raise his mind and remain established in Higher Consciousness. He could swing between duality and non-duality, back and forth. In an instant, at his wish, his mind would swing from finite to infinite and back. Through his experience, he has expressed this idea of Oneness. He is the embodiment of the Vedas and Upanishads. While Upanishads use high level language to explain the ultimate truth, and at some points Upanishads could not express more, Sri Ramakrishna was vocal and he explained the truths of Upanishads in a common man's language. Vivekananda wanted to bring the Upanishads from the forest to every home. He wanted to make Vedanta a practical thing in life. He did it and he demonstrated that Vedanta can be made practical. That is why it is called practical Vedanta. It is a different philosophy. We do karma with some motive, for self-gratification, for name, fame, power, position, wealth,

prosperity and others. This is called "*sakama karma*." There is nothing wrong with that, but it does not give us the joy we were expecting. So, we then start doing "*nishkama karma*."

Once Totapuri got a very severe stomach ache that he could not tolerate. He thought to himself that he is Brahman and Atman and yet still his mind is dragged down to body consciousness. Therefore, he decided to give up his body. He started walking to the Ganga to drown himself. As he walked into the Ganga, the waters miraculously became shallow, preventing him from drowning himself. He almost reached the other bank of the river, when he decided to turn back. He was puzzled by the experience. He went to Ramakrishna and said, "What Divine Maya! I went to drown myself, but the water was never deep enough to allow me to do so." Upon Ramakrishna's urging, Totapuri went to Mother Kali, and he had the revelation of immanent reality. He saw that the deity of the Mother was no more an image but a palpable reality with light emanating from her, and he felt the soothing Mother's love everywhere. Then he came to realize that the Transcendental and the Immanent are the same.

We also see a similar example in Swami Vivekananda's life. Swamiji did not believe in the immanent aspect of reality. He was a Brahmo believer. He did not believe in idol worship. As a young boy, he used to sleep with his forehead on his pillow and used to experience a bright emanating light. He used to drown into this ocean of light as he fell asleep. This was his experience every day. Rakhai used to go to the Kali temple to salute, but Naren used to admonish him for that because Rakhai was also a registered Brahmo. Ramakrishna came to Rakhai's rescue and asked Naren to leave Rakhai alone. Once Naren's family was suffering from financial difficulties, and they did not have any money to even feed themselves. He went to Ramakrishna and asked him to pray to Mother Kali to help his mother and siblings with their situation. Ramakrishna said that only Mother Kali could help and asked Naren to go and seek Mother's help. He said that Mother would give whatever he would ask for. Naren hesitantly went to the temple and immediately saw that the Mother was not just an image. He saw the Mother in all her glory, full of light emanating from her, which filled the entire sanctum sanctorum and permeated everywhere. Seeing the divine form, he could not bring himself down to ask the Mother for worldly things. He experienced the same exact scenario the second and third time he went back to the temple to ask Mother for financial help. Ramakrishna said that Mother had not given Naren a luxurious life but by Her grace, he and his family would have enough to not suffer from lacking the basic needs of life. After that experience Ramakrishna taught Naren a song, "Ma Twam hi Tara," which he sang all night as he fell asleep on the floor in Ramakrishna's room. When other devotees came in early morning and saw Naren on the floor, Ramakrishna told them that Naren had finally accepted the Mother and that he accepted the immanent aspect of the reality, not just the transcendental.

There are several examples of accepting the immanent aspect of Reality in various scriptures and in direct experiences of various sages and Sadhus. Ramakrishna had that direct experience, and it did not end with him. He passed it on to Swami Vivekananda. Totapuri also had a similar experience. There are also many examples in our own lifetime. There are swamis who have that understanding of that reality. But the question is, if that is the truth, how can we apply it to ourselves? You can go about experimenting as you would do in a chemistry lab, for

example you have to collect the apparatus, and then you need a lab procedure to conduct the experiment. Similarly, in spiritual pursuit there is a procedure to be followed and an apparatus to experiment with. We need the tool of our mind and the purity of our heart. We need selfless activity so that we are open to the truth.

First, do not disregard the theory that God is everywhere and He can be seen. It can be experienced. Swamiji said, "I worship that God which many people have mistakenly called human beings". Swamiji said, "I will be born again and again. I will be the voice without form, and I shall inspire men everywhere until the world knows it is one with God." This was the great mission of Swami Vivekananda. It is not just for some saints and sages. This message is for all of us. We have to apply it. We have to follow the footsteps of these sages. Swami Vivekananda is the modern sage. Swamiji said, "In the past, the Vedanta was practicable, and it was made practical in the lives of the kings of the country of our ancient times. This Brahma Vidya was in the hands of the sages and kings. If kings, who have hectic lives, could practice it, then why can't we practice this principle of seeing the Divine Self in everyone and everywhere and see not the name and form but what is behind the name and form."

In you and me, who is the witness? It is the consciousness. Who is there that observes the whole day? Who is there that observes dreams? Who is there when you are in deep sleep to let you know that you slept well? How do you know and have memory of deep sleep unless there is that conscious witness? This is the Vedantic way of analysis: analysis by 5 sheaths, witness idea, reflection theory, Drishti-Srishti-vad, Srishti-drishti-vad, etc. These are philosophical approaches. Of all these philosophical approaches, the best approach is what Ramakrishna and Vivekananda gave in this age. Try to see the divine everywhere and in everything. Even if you do not understand, you can start from the beginning; follow the steps of the procedure described. It is like a scientific experiment. The Ramakrishna Movement is scientific research into the philosophical aspects of Vedanta. We are all researchers to find Brahman in our life. If I quote Einstein, you will not doubt me. Similarly, in spiritual life we quote Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, or Ramakrishna's disciples, as they are always absorbed in the divine. Applying this philosophy in our lives is seeing God in your husband, in your wife, and in your children.

This is a unique idea that resonated all over India and made India so great. You do not love your husband because he is your husband, but because there is Atman in him. The husband does not love his wife because she is his wife, but because he sees Atman in her. How do you attain this angle of vision and apply this philosophy? Swami Vivekananda said, "The old religion is to say that he is an atheist who does not believe in God; but the new religion says he is an atheist who does not believe in himself. If you do believe in the divine in yourself, then why not believe the divine in others? This is the statement of the greatest spiritual scientists. If you apply this to daily life, every home will be a heaven. If you look at your child as your child, then it will have the bearing of good and the bad. Rather look at your child as having the same Atman as you, but casting a different mask. You are not stopping your household life and going into the forest and caves. You are doing all your duties, but the whole perspective changes. Every day has the joy of meditation. When you wake up, despite whatever you do, you are

serving the divine. Can we bring forth the oneness that exists in all of us? Can we bring the attitude in our life that whatever I am doing - I am serving that Divine Atman that is in me also? We should serve all as the same God with different masks.

What is the difference between a living person and a dead person? For the latter, the mask remains and the one who was inside is disconnected. Seeing this in daily life is Practical Vedanta. Swamiji has given this big task to all his devotees and followers: not to see matter as matter but see matter as the consciousness behind it. Modern science is also leading us in that direction. The whole universe is the energy which can only be converted from one form to another. It cannot be created or destroyed (The law of the conservation of energy). The Upanishads also reveal this in the concept of 'prana'. Where modern science is going now, our sages have gone one step beyond already. This is the source of all awareness and consciousness.

Swami Vivekananda taught the Practical Vedanta and told his brother disciples and his disciples to serve patients in the hospitals as one serves God in the temples. Traditional monks did not comprehend this concept and in the past they told that 'these Ramakrishna Sadhus are sweeper sadhus'. Ramakrishna Sadhus were giving bath to sick people and were washing their soiled clothes. These monks were serving people considering them as Shiva. If these monks can do it and serve, we can also serve. This is why Swamiji brought the concept of service with the attitude of seeing God in those you serve. We may not be successful right away, but with practice we can make progress.

By applying this Vedantic truth of complete oneness, there is only love, there is only joy, and there are only blessings. What we see is what our clouded mind is showing us. If my spectacles are clouded, I only see things as hazy. If they are colored, then I see the world as colored. We are only seeing and hearing things that is interpreted by our mind. The world is what it is, but we see it based on the interpretation of our mind. Many people may look outside and think what a beautiful day, but the one whose mind is clouded by a situation will feel the same day is miserable. Let us purify our mind and see Reality as it is. We pray that the blessings of the great teachers of our age will be upon us to see the divine inside and outside us and to serve God. If your finger is cut, you will not say that you are compassionate to your finger. Rather, you feel pain and compassion for yourself. When you feel hungry and you eat, you do not thank your hand for that because the hunger is yours, the hand is yours, and the mouth is yours. As Holy Mother said, try to make the world your own. This is called Practical Vedanta. A mother naturally feels oneness with her baby and suffers just as much, if not more, when the baby is sick. This is the effect of love for others.

In ignorance, we separate one from the other and forget the oneness. Unity in diversity is the plan and goal of life and that is the reality of life. We cannot reach that unity unless we practice. Once we practice, we will feel that someone's suffering is my suffering, someone's joy is my joy, and someone's success is my success. That will come spontaneously. Brahman is the ritual, Brahman is the offering, and the fire that digests food is also Brahman. The end result is the realization of that Brahman. Swami Saradananda has addressed the question that only a

few people have realized that oneness, but the other millions of people see things differently. Saradanandaji said, "Truth does not depend on how many people call it truth. Truth is truth, even if one person says it". That potential is in all of us to realize this oneness. Effort is required to practice to realize this oneness. We must think how can I love, how can I respect, and how can I see oneness to make our minds stay in that state of oneness. We should try to realize oneness, but simultaneously, we should also use our commonsense. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'there is Brahman in the tiger, but we have to salute the tiger from a distance'. The outer mask is the tiger, but if you hug the tiger, its outer mask will eat your outer mask! Be careful about that. Keep up your spiritual attitude and make your life joyful. Thank you.