

## Swami Tyagananda: Vedanta and Health

*(Revered Swami Tyagananda is the spiritual head of Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston. As part of the 40<sup>th</sup> year celebrations of Vidyapith, Swami Tyagananda was invited to give a talk on “Vedanta and Health” on Thursday, October 20, 2016. The following lecture has been prepared for publication from a video recording of Swamiji’s lecture.)*

I am very happy to be here. I want to begin by congratulating Vivekananda Vidyapith and all of you who are associated with it, especially Uncle and Aunty, for the amazing milestone of the completion of 40 years.

There is something special about 40. People usually start wearing glasses at the age of 40. So, to signify this age or act of wearing glasses there is a special word in Indian languages. Certainly there is a word in Marathi, called “*chaalisi*”. It also signifies ‘coming of an age’, or ‘attaining an age of maturity’. Just like one is expected to become mature at the age of 40 in life, the same is true in the life of an organization. For the organization, at the age of 40, a good solid foundation has been laid. Also, firm traditions have been set. Definitely it has happened here in the life of Vivekananda Vidyapith. Uncle mentioned that hundreds of young men and women come to this institution and many of the Vidyapith alumni’s children come to the Vidyapith. Thus, a wonderful tradition has been set. Along with maturity comes responsibility as well. Future generations have the responsibility to hold onto these traditions and values that Vidyapith has developed and build upon them. Then, working for Vidyapith to build Vidyapith, our own lives will get built. The health of Vidyapith is directly connected with the health of the people who are connected with it and are learning from it.

That, incidentally, happens to be the topic of the speech as well, ‘*Vedanta and Health*’. To make a firm disclaimer, I have to say that I have no background in medicine. It requires some amount of courage to speak about health with no knowledge of medicine, and especially to speak in front of several of you who are doctors or are studying to become doctors. Sometimes it has been said that the less you know about a subject, the more confidently you can speak about it. So, if you see me speaking very confidently, you can be sure that I know very little about health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. I like this definition because it views health not only in negative terms (absence of disease), but also in positive terms (complete physical, mental and social wellbeing). It is not just the absence of disease that leads to happiness. There needs to be physical, mental and social wellbeing. Understanding it in this way, health and happiness are inseparable. The happiness that most of us are aware of in our daily life is fleeting, it comes and goes. There are times in our lives when we are happy and there are times when we are not happy. If we are asked as we grow older about what our experience of life is, most of us are inclined to say that it is a mixture of joy and sorrow. Life seems to swing between smiles, laughter, sorrow and pain. Sometimes we think that it is more of one than the other. But, if we add all our joy and all our sorrows, then at the end of the balance sheet, they are more or less equal. While happiness is wonderful, and all of us have a chance to be happy in life, what we really want is not just simply happiness, but happiness that never goes away.

Swami Atmananda, head of Raipur center, used to tell a story: In mid 70s he had gone to visit one of his devotees, a businessman in the central part of India. During that particular year this businessman had made a lot of profit in his business. Swami expected the businessman devotee to be happy because of all the money he made that year. But he seemed to be very sad and morose. Swami was surprised to see that and asked the devotee why he was so morose even after he had made so much profit that year. The devotee said that although he did well that year, he did very poorly the previous year. Swamiji told him that this

year he had made up for the loss of the last year and still made more profit, so he should be happy. This did not cheer him up. The businessman said that now he worries about what will happen next year! That is the problem with our happiness. Even when happiness comes, it comes loaded with the memory of past pain and anxiety about future pain. So what we really want is not simply these little bits of happiness that come, but happiness that will never go away. That is why in all religious texts, there is the idea of *heaven*. In popular belief, heaven is a place of just happiness that never goes away. That is not something we have now. Because we don't have it now, we hope, pray and imagine that there will come a time in future when there will be happiness and happiness alone. The problem is that if the source of our happiness is limited, then the happiness it brings will be limited. If ice-cream makes me happy, then first of all the extent of my happiness is limited to the size of the plate or cup in which ice-cream is served. We say "Oh! I wanted some more." This common sense observation is found in an ancient Upanishad called *Chandogya Upanishad*. It says, "*Yo vai bhooma tatsukham, nalpe sukamasti. Bhoomaiva sukham.*" This means that real happiness is only in the infinite and there is no joy in finite, limited things. In the analogy above, suppose we badly want ice-cream and we don't have ice-cream. We crave it thinking "we want ice-cream". If we want something and we don't have it, then we become restless to have that thing. When we get it, we get some happiness, but that happiness does not remain forever, since it is perishable. Since the ice-cream is limited and it does not remain forever, when it leaves, it leaves behind some memory of good taste but also the sadness of the loss. So even the happiness we get is punctuated by restlessness and anxiety in the beginning, and anxiety again at the end, as to when we will get it again.

As I told you before, happiness and health are interconnected. To be healthy means to attain a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. If we want to be healthy, totally and completely, then we must be happy, totally and completely. As we have seen, if the source of happiness is limited, then the experience of happiness is also limited. So, what we want now is to become infinite, to become unlimited. If I can experience that un-limitedness, that infinitude, then my happiness will never go away. That will be the sign of perfect health. At present we don't feel that we are infinite. We feel that we are very limited beings; we are mortal human beings who are very vulnerable. There are forces outside in the world that are much more powerful than us. This has got to change. But, how can we change our present limited identity? How can we be what we are not? According to Vedanta, we are not truly ourselves right now. We have become someone else.

The word for a healthy person in Sanskrit and in many Indian languages is *swastha*. Literally translated, *swa* means "self" and *stha* means "to be established in it". So, *swastha* means "one who is established in oneself". Simply put, "one who is oneself". In many Indian languages when people greet each other, they ask, "Are you *swastha*?" When we literally translate it then it means, "Are you yourself?" The word for an unhealthy person is *aswastha*, meaning "one who is not oneself". The question is what is the self? The word for "self" often used in daily life is the first person pronoun, "I." Each time we use the word "I" we are referring to our self. So what is this "self" of ours? When we close our eyes and mentally repeat four or five times "I," what comes to mind? Obviously, the first thing comes to mind is the body. When I say "I am standing here," I mean that "my body is standing here." When we look in the mirror, we think we see ourselves. But we are only looking at the reflection of our 'body'. We think that the reflection in the mirror is very close approximation of who we are. When we see a happy reflection in the mirror, we think we must be happy. All of what we are, our self-identity, is based on what we 'see' in the mirror. But, we also know that we are not simply the body. There are aspects of my personality that are not visible even to a surgeon when my body is cut open, like my mind, my intellect, my ego, my thoughts, my emotions, my feelings. These are not part of my body, but are part of my personality. Let us call all these invisible aspects of our personality the 'mind.' Here we are including *mana* (thoughts), *buddhi* (emotions), *chitta* (intellect), and *ahamkara* (impressions collected in the mind and our ego) into the word "mind".

Then a question arises: Am I anything else than my body and my mind? What we learn from Vedanta is that we are not simply the body and mind, but behind the body and mind there is 'spirit' within.

In Sanskrit it is called, *aatma* or *aatman*. So we are made up of the body, mind and the *aatman*. Are we all of these three or one of these three? From the books we learn that our true identity is that 'I am *aatman*.' This *aatman* is the only non-material part of who I am. We all know that the body is a material thing. We also know the chemical compositions of our body. We have no doubt about the body being material. Now, what about the mind? The Vedic sages were very courageous and bold in classifying even the mind as material. For many people it is difficult to comprehend that the mind is material. The problem is that the usage of the word 'spiritual' has lately become much diluted because we use it everywhere. If we see a beautiful sunset or listen to soothing music, we feel that it is spiritual. Any experience of calmness, peace or tranquility is referenced to as 'spiritual.' Actually, this is just a relaxed state of body and mind. Often this experience has nothing to do with the 'spirit' at all. Because we do not have that relaxed experience of body and mind often, we think it is spiritual. Because of this wrong usage of 'spirit,' we think that the mind is not material. But, if we think about it, then we find that there is not much difference between the body and the mind. Whatever applies to the body, also applies to the mind. For example, just as the body gets tired, the mind gets tired as well; the body gets ill if we put junk food into it and mind falls ill if we put junk thoughts into the mind. Both have their doctors and both need medicine to recover. The only difference is that we can see the body but not the mind. Just because we cannot see it, it does not mean that it is spiritual. We cannot see an electron, but that does not make it spiritual.

The classification of the mind also as material agrees with even what modern medicine has increasingly come to recognize. That is why the majority of the illnesses we see today are considered psychosomatic. We know that what happens to the body usually influences the mind, as well, and vice versa. The reason why the body and mind are able to react and act upon one another is because they are both material.

At present, it seems that I feel that I am all these three - the body, mind and Atman. However, according to Vedanta, I am really only Atman, the spirit, which is non-material. Because it is non-material, it does not have to follow the laws of matter. One of the laws of nature is that if there is composition, meaning particles are combined together, then it pre-supposes a future decomposition. Swami Vivekananda, in one of his Chicago lectures given at the World Parliament of Religions, mentioned this concept. The body and mind follow the principle of composition and decomposition. In the case of the body, particles are held together by a force called '*prana*,' which keeps us 'alive.' When that force disappears, the particles decompose just as after death, the body becomes a heap of ashes. So, the body and mind are materials. Because they are materials, they have a beginning and an end. But, the non-material Atman has no beginning and no end.

When we read in the books, "In reality, I am birth-less, and I am death-less," it means that the real I, which is Atman, is birth-less and death-less. The body and mind have a beginning and an end. Therefore, they cannot be birth-less and death-less. So, in reality, we are Atman.

The real question is this: If I am Atman, then why I don't I feel that 'I am Atman?' First of all, if you know that you are Atman, then you have a lot to lose. You cannot celebrate your birthday since you were not born. So, even if you know you are Atman, don't tell your friends that you are Atman. They will not come to celebrate your birthday and will not wish you a 'Happy Birthday.' Get all the gifts and know deep in your heart that 'You are Atman.' By knowing that 'you are Atman', you gain something. When 'fear of death' comes or 'fear of illnesses' comes to the mind, then you know that you have nothing to lose. You know well that while the body will go, and the mind will go, you, as Atman, do not die. Those who are studying the Bhagavad Gita know that in the second chapter, Sri Krishna says that as we remove the worn-out clothes and put on new clothes, the Atman changes bodies. We do not feel that we have lost something when we remove the worn-out clothes. We know that when we are reborn, we are still there.

The awareness that I am still there when I am reborn, I was never born, and I will never die is at the root of truly being '*Swastha*.' I can be myself only when I know that I am Atman. The body and mind will not disappear when I know I am Atman, but I will no longer see those as myself. Just as I do not see my clothes as myself, I will not see my body and mind as myself. As clothes cover me, the body and mind cover my real Self – Atman. You all use computers. They are very helpful and useful instruments for you. But, if some day you wake up and say, 'I am my computer', then people will think there is something wrong with you. That will not prevent you from taking good care of your computer. Similarly, when you realize that you are Atman, it does not mean that you neglect and ignore your body and mind. The body and mind are useful. We cannot do anything without our body and mind. These are the two great instruments we have received for free and we have to make the best use of them. The only thing is that we have to recognize the body and mind as two instruments and use them.

Right now, my 'I' is the body, mind and Atman. How can I become my real Self? How can I become truly '*swastha*?' According to Vedanta, the real health of Self is when I become the 'real me,' not the 'false me.' The question is: 'How can I be myself?' We have to learn to see ourselves as beyond the body and mind. There is a saying in Vedanta: 'To see is to be.' Swami Vivekananda said, "Change the subject and the object is bound to change. Purify yourself and the world is bound to be purified." This is the one thing that must be taught now more than ever before. The world will change if we change. If we are pure, the world will become pure. The question is why should I see evil in others? I cannot see evil unless I become evil. Sometimes we feel like complaining about the world outside. It is good to remind ourselves that our capacity to change the external world is very limited. I cannot bring a permanent change in the world. I need to change this in order to change that. Swami Vivekananda wrote in one of his letters to his disciple, Goodwin, "We, Vedantists, must look at everything from the subjective standpoint." Most people see things and say, "Why is that thing that way?" But, a Vedanta student will say, "Why am I *seeing* that thing that way? If I change my way of seeing a thing, perhaps that thing outside will change." In Dakshineswar, during the times of Sri Ramakrishna, all people who went to the temple saw the beautiful image of the Divine Mother Kali. But Sri Ramakrishna went into the temple and saw a living, breathing Divine Mother. How come he saw something and the rest of them saw something different? If he and those other people were living in the same world, how could he see something totally different from what other people saw? The thing is that something changed inside Sri Ramakrishna. When the subject changed, the object also changed for him.

Swami Vivekananda says in his Karma Yoga lectures that the world is like a dog's curly tail. You can never make the world straight. Reformers have come in every generation and we need them to come and try to do good to the world and try to help the world. But, we must recognize that all the help we give to the world is limited. It is only temporary. After some time, someone else has to come and help again. The easiest way to understand this is to think of a hungry person coming to you for food. Since it is our duty to help the hungry person, you feed that hungry person. You have done something good. You have made one person less hungry in the world. But, how long will that good last? After eight to ten hours that person will become hungry again. On the other hand, if I help that person in the spirit of true Karma yoga, by feeding that person while truly seeing God in him, then I will acquire '*chitta shuddhi*,' or purity of mind. The spiritual benefit I get will be everlasting. Our ability to change ourselves is permanent, whereas the ability to change the outside world is limited.

This principle of 'to see is to be' can be put into practice by using a method taught by Swami Vivekananda. I like to call this method the 'look at the ocean method.' To quote Swamiji, "Look at the ocean, not the wave. Although we appear as little waves, the whole ocean is at our back and we are one with it. No wave can exist of itself. This whole universe is my body. All health, all happiness is mine because all is in the universe. Say, "I am the universe." How can we say, "I am the universe?" I know that I am this one little person here and the universe is so vast. Just a few days ago, I was reading in *The Atlantic*, a monthly magazine, that scientists used to believe that there were about 500 billion galaxies. Now, with

newer research, they believe there are about 300 trillion galaxies. I am sure these numbers will change in due course with more research. What I want to emphasize is that even to grasp the vastness of this material universe is beyond us. Although the mind is more powerful than the body, it is incomprehensible to understand the physical vastness of the universe. I am this little being. How can I say, 'I am the universe?' The only way to be able to understand that 'I am the universe', is to look at the little 'I' and find the true nature of that 'I'. Swami Vivekananda uses the Ocean and the Wave example to help us understand this concept. There are four commonsense observations which help us understand the relationship between the wave and the ocean.

(1) **The wave is not different from the ocean:** The wave is nothing but the same water of the ocean, taking a specific form and moving in a certain way. So, the wave is inseparable from the ocean. We cannot take the wave out and say 'this is the wave and that is the ocean.' So, the wave is not different from the ocean. (2) **The wave is kind of different from the ocean:** You never look at the wave and say it is the ocean. The wave has a separate identity because it has a specific form. You can identify a wave distinctly from the rest of the ocean. So, it is not different from the ocean, but kind of separate from the ocean. (3) **The form of the wave is temporary:** We know that no wave remains forever. It originates, it rises, and it merges back into the ocean. (4) **Once that wave form ends, it loses its identity:** Once a wave has merged back into the ocean, you cannot distinguish it and say, 'here was the wave.' That water which took the form of a wave for a short period of time has returned to being the ocean again.

Let us think that you are not standing on the shore and watching the waves. Rather, you are the wave itself. When other friend-waves ask you who you are, the wave will look inside itself and see that it is made of the same water as the body of the big ocean behind it. The wave will know that this form will go away eventually. The wave form going away is really the 'death' of that wave. The wave might get frightened that after a while it is going to die. Another wave will come and tell her that only its form will go away, and it cannot die. You are just the water of the ocean. Even when the form goes away, you are still there, not just as a little wave, but as the mighty ocean. That is who we are. Right now, we think we are this little wave. We have to look inside and ponder if we are really that small. What am I afraid of? What does the end mean? Does death mean that there is no existence for me? Or is it just this form that is disappearing?

That is the way we go forward in reflecting a little bit more on this subject. If we look at the material world as a big ocean of material particles and every one of us as a wave in that ocean, then there is no separation. Even though it looks like I am standing here, and you are all sitting there, there is really no gap between us because the air is also filled with material particles. So, in some sense, it is one unbroken continuous ocean of matter. Some material particles concentrated in some form, held together by some force acquire a certain name. The particles that have come together to form my body have acquired a certain name. Similarly, the particles that are held together to form this podium are given that name. So, every object in this world, living or non-living, can be seen as one material wave in this big ocean of matter. Although the color, density, and configuration of the object vary, what is not changing is the fact that they are all material particles. Just as the wave in the ocean gains water from the ocean and loses some to the ocean during its existence, our bodies also gain material particles since they come into existence and lose material particles back into the ocean of particles during its existence. That is how a wave changes its size. First, it is a small wave. Then, it becomes a big wave. When I eat an apple, the particles of the apple that were not a part of me now end up being a part of me. There is an easy natural exchange of particles between bodies.

When I eat an apple, the particles of the apple that were not part of me now end up being a part of me. There is an easy natural exchange of particles between bodies. Swamiji says in one place that some tiny particle might have been on moon or mars at some point and maybe it is part of my body now. At this microscopic level even our bodies are continually exchanging matter with other bodies. I remember about

10 years ago I was planning to go to India. A doctor told me that I need various shots as precaution. I laughed and said that I was born and raised in India and I don't need these shots. The doctor asked me, 'Swami! How long have you lived in America?' I told him that I am here in America for about 10 years. The doctor smiled and told me, "Swami! Your mind may still be Indian, but your body has become an American now and you need these shots."

Another way to understand is through the expression in Sanskrit, "*Pravaha Nityatvam*" the ever-changing constancy that is associated with a river. You can never step into the same river twice. If you go into a river and after few moments if you go back in again, the water in the river has changed. You may think it is the same river, but it is not the same water anymore. Similarly, I might think that this is the same body I have had, but every little particle has changed over a period of time. It is an illusion to think it is the same body. Swami Vivekananda said, "No person was ever born who could stop his body for one moment from changing. Body is the name of a series of changes. As in a river, the masses of water are changing before you every moment and new masses are coming, yet taking similar form. So it is with the body." The word "*Samsara*" in Sanskrit literally means that which is constantly moving. The body is part of the "*Samsara*", which is constantly changing.

How do we apply these 4 observations mentioned earlier, to this little wave of the body? In this ocean of matter, my little body is one wave. When I look at this wave of the body, what do I see? The collection of particles that make up my body wave is no different than the ocean of matter itself. We have already established that continual exchange of material between bodies. This supports the first observation that the body particles are not different from the particles of the ocean of matter. The second observation is that the body wave is not exactly same as the ocean of the universe because it has the specific form. So, this body is not different from the material world, but it is kind of different because it has this physical form. The third observation is that this body wave is temporary. We know that because changes are continually occurring in this body. We don't see every change as death. For example, a little child has grown up into a teenager. Theoretically we can say that the child is dead, and a teenager is born. But that is not true. For the one who was there is still there, but the body has been changed. One little boy was once asked, 'what is your age?' He said, 'I am five years old'. Then he was asked, 'what is the age of your parents?' He replied, 'they are also five years old'. 'How can your parents be 5 years old when you are 5 years old?' He said, 'they became parents only when I was born'. We always say that a baby is born, but that is from our perspective. From the baby's perspective a parent is born, especially for the first child. Identity is very relative. So, the body wave's form is temporary. It can change through illness and, of course, through death. After death, the body wave is indistinguishable from the ocean of matter because the form is gone. In other words, as they say, dust returns to dust. Swami Vivekananda said, "there can be no physical death for us and no material death when we see that all is one, all bodies are mine. So, the body is eternal because the trees, the animals, the sun, the moon, or in totality the universe itself is my body. Then how can it die? If a hair falls out, we don't think we die. So, if body dies, that is but a hair falling." The moment I realize that this body is a little wave in this ocean of matter, my body cannot die based on the law of conservation of matter. Parts of my body may be in a garden helping a plant grow, or in a flower making people smile. Think about it and know that even after my 'death' particles of my body are there in the universe in some form or the other. Thus, death does not mean my non-existence even at the physical level. This will give us a new understanding of what death means. We can even think of physical immortality. When we look at the ocean and see its presence even within the waves we begin to then understand what being birth-less and death-less means.

In Swamiji's words, 'He alone lives whose life is in the whole universe. That is the ocean. If we concentrate our lives on limited things, waves, the faster we go towards death. The fear of death can be conquered when we realize that I am in everything. I am in every body. I am in all lives. I am the universe. Then alone comes the state of fearlessness.' When we narrow it down to, it is all about me, then I will be

the most fearful person in the world. Fear will never leave my heart. The more I stop identifying me with myself, and the more I expand myself, then the fear of death is minimized’.

Expansion naturally happens to some extent. We identify ourselves with our family. That is expanding me to include being a part of the family. It can also be expanded further like, ‘my neighborhood’, or ‘my country’. Patriotism is nothing but identifying with the larger group than just myself. Why should it limit to the country? It can expand further. Some people like to call themselves as citizens of the world. That is great if it is not just meant to be a good expression. If you truly feel that you are connected with the human family, then you are expanding yourself to the human family. Thus, more I connect myself with a larger entity, the fear of my death becomes more minimized and ultimately goes away. If I identify myself with the whole humanity, then I know that as long as one human is alive, then I am still there. That is what expansion means. It is not just about fearlessness. You will also be free from jealousy, anger, envy and all such negative emotions of the heart. Why would I have hatred for anyone? It is like two waves fighting about who is bigger and who is more beautiful when in reality after a short while both disappear and merge back into the ocean. When we realize that what I think as ‘the other’ is not actually the other, then I realize that hating ‘the other’ means hating me. By being nasty to others I am being nasty to my own self. On the other hand, by helping others I am really helping myself. There is a famous saying “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Swami Vivekananda said, ‘Love thy neighbor because thy neighbor is yourself’.

Even from the state of enlightened Self-interest, have more Self-interest because the more you love, it is not going outside but is only reaching the ‘Self’ (meaning the love stays in the universe one identifies with as an enlightened Self). That is the benefit thinking about the ocean idea gives us. Furthermore, it gives us the consciousness of the food we take, both in quality and quantity. When I now the food I am taking is going to be a part of me, why would I put in junk in me and make my own self filled with junk. I will be very careful with what kind of food I eat. As to the quantity, should I take more than what I need? We know that there are lots of places in the world where people don’t know where their next meal comes from. Hunger is a real problem in the world. When we live in a prosperous country we may not even realize it. Even today, there are people in the world who die of hunger. That makes me conscious because the pain in the heart of every hungry person is my pain. That is another wave in the same ocean. That makes me be mindful of the quality and the quantity of food I eat. So physically and mentally the wave concept will take me to a more healthy state of mind.

In summary, the benefits of relating ourselves to the ocean of matter: helps in minimizing the fear of death, helps in cultivating the virtue of same sightedness (I see all, big or small, as waves in the same ocean to which I belong), it prevents the rise of negative qualities such as jealousy, envy, hatred, it encourages us to develop healthy food habits and helps us live in a very environmentally friendly manner. All these will be strengthened and more get added to the list if we can add one more ocean, the ocean of ideas and feelings or the ocean of cosmic mind. Just as it is possible to see this little body as a wave in the ocean of matter, it is possible to see my little mind as a little wave in the ocean of the cosmic mind. Swami Vivekananda said, ‘Each mind is connected with every other mind and each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world’. Swamiji goes on to describe the process of ‘thought transference’. Sometimes we call it telepathy. Our general communication is not very efficient. Let us see how our conventional communication happens: There are certain ideas going on in my head. I try to put them into words. When I speak those words then I make sound waves. These sound waves reach your ears and they go inside your brain. Your mind then turns the sound waves back into words and then turn the words to ideas. This is a very convoluted and inefficient way of communication. What if ideas from my mind go directly as ideas into your mind? That would be the most efficient way. Swami Vivekananda says that it is possible to communicate ideas directly from a brain to other brains without being spoken. That is why some of the greatest teachers that were ever born on earth did not need any words. In a verse in *Dakshinamurthy stotra* Sankaracharya says, “*Gurostu maunam vyakhyanam, shishyatu chhinna shanshayasa.*” The imagery provided is that a young yogi (teacher) sitting under a tree with lot of students

sitting in front of him. Most of the students are older in age than the teacher. Sankaracharya says that the lecture the young teacher gave was in silence. No word was spoken. All the doubts in those students' minds were dispelled. You see such incidents in the lives of all the great teachers. You can see in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in the lives of his direct disciples and other great saints and sages that many times students do not have to ask them any question. Just being in their presence a lot of their questions were automatically resolved. Thus, transmitting ideas through words is not an efficient form of communication. Ramakrishna did not always have to speak to communicate. Sometimes when Narendra comes in, Sri Ramakrishna just goes to him and touches him. That touch or a glance was enough to communicate his thoughts to Narendra. Those are more efficient ways of teaching or communicating. That is what Swami Vivekananda was referring to. All of this becomes more comprehensible only if we understand that as the bodies are connected as waves in the ocean of matter, our minds are connected as waves in the ocean of the cosmic mind or Universal Mind.

Now, let us apply those same 4 observations to the mind: (1) Our mind is not different from the cosmic mind: Just as material particles can enter my body and leave my body, the thoughts, ideas, and feelings from this larger pool of the cosmic mind can enter into my mind. And through the way of expressing my thoughts and feelings, I am sharing them with others. Just as my body is a constantly changing entity, my mind is also a constantly changing entity. We know that our thoughts, ideas and feelings change as we grow from childhood to youth and then old age. They are based on our tendencies and circumstances. So, the mind is a dynamic entity. Thus, the mind is one little wave that is not different from the large ocean of the cosmic mind. (2) The mind has distinct identity: My mind is different from yours. That is why you cannot immediately know what is in my mind unless I say what I am thinking. Thus, the mind is not different from the cosmic mind, but yet it is separate from it. (3) The mind, being subtle, lasts longer than the body: Since the mind is also material, it is perishable. The mind we have now has been with us for a very long time. Vedanta says that rebirth is only for the body and it does not mean that we get a new mind. We get a new body in every birth, but the same mind enters the new body. Therefore, take better care of your mind because it is going to be with you for a longer time. Regarding the body there is a chance that you get a better model and a brand-new body. Although the mind is subtle and lasts longer, it is still material and will perish one day. (4) When the mind perishes, it is indistinguishable from the cosmic mind: When body dies, we understand that we will be reborn again. What will happen if the mind dies? What would be my identity if, my mind dies? There is a debate about what happens to a person when his/her mind is transplanted. Swami Vivekananda says that 'my identity will not be lost even with the loss of my mind.' He says, "There is no individuality except in the Infinite." So, my true individuality is in the ocean. That is the only condition that does not change. Everything else is in a constant state of flux.

We sometimes refer to ourselves as individuals. When Swamiji was in the US and talked about oneness, people used to get frightened and asked him what would happen to their individuality. Swamiji replied saying that they were not individuals yet. The etymological meaning of 'individual' is 'that which cannot be divided.' Right now, we are 'dividuals' because all our concepts are based on separate and divided identity. I can become indivisible only when I identify myself with the spirit, because the spirit cannot be divided, the spirit cannot die, and the spirit doesn't change. People think that they are individuals because they have the mind. But, on the contrary, when our mind dies, we will get back to our true identity. One of the chapters of the book "*Jeevan Mukti Viveka*" talks about '*Mano Naasa*.' If the body and mind are coverings and the atman is hidden inside, in order to see the atman, the coverings have to be removed. I don't have to take much trouble to remove the body covering, because it falls with the age. It is the mind covering that poses a tougher problem. The mind becomes the nucleus around which the new body is formed and takes physical birth again. When mind dies, there will be nothing to hold that atman inside and that is when that mind-wave becomes one with the ocean. That is when there is no coming back. That is why when a spiritually ignorant person dies, it is only the death of the body. The mind in that case goes to other *lokas* based on the accumulated karma and has to be reborn again. But, when an enlightened being passes away nothing remains. It is said in the Upanishads, '*Atraiva Sarve Praviliyate*.' Both the body and the mind have

returned to the source itself and there is no coming back again. The Buddha is referred to as '*Tathagata*,' which means 'no going and no coming back.' That is the reality.

So, what are the benefits of seeing ourselves as part of the universal mind? First, the little 'I' of the mind-wave will vanish. Swamiji says that forgetting the little 'I' is a sign of a healthy and pure mind. For example, physical health means that the body does not come in my way. When there is something wrong with my body, it makes its presence felt through some pain. When you don't notice your body at all, that means you are physically healthy. Similarly, a completely healthy mind would be the one we don't have to think about it. It is like a completely "healthy" car. If a car is "ill", it will start making sounds or indicate signs of problems. Then, we have to take it to the garage to fix it. The second benefit is that it produces detachment from my own obsessions, worries and anxieties and broadens my vision. It removes the sense of ownership that binds us too often. Take for example, the idea of Intellectual Property. People have built their fortunes around the IP of their brilliant ideas. There is nothing inherently wrong about that. Just think about it, what does 'my idea' mean? What if Sri Krishna had put a copyright on Gita? He wouldn't have taught Arjuna without Arjuna paying for the lecture. All the ideas in Vedas and Upanishads don't even have names associated with them. The concept of 'ownership of an idea' was completely unknown in ancient times. I am not suggesting that you give away your patents. You can keep your patents, but know that nothing is really yours. A person's idea is based upon many preceding ideas. People like to say that they are self-made. There is no one who is self-made. We have received so much from the world outside. A human baby is the most helpless creature ever born. If parents and/or people around did not help a baby, the baby would not have survived. What made us who we are today is the cumulative result of the care, the love, the friendship, the food, the air and everything we got at different stages of life. Merely saying 'I did not depend on anyone,' does not make it true. Gratitude must be a part of our being because we are not self-made. The more we acknowledge that we received so much from so many, the greater will be the power we can manifest within us. Then the sense of 'attachment' and 'ownership' goes away. I won't, then, hesitate to love others because the love that I have now is the love that came from the people and the world outside. Shri Krishna speaks about the "*Yagna*" in the third chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. He says, "*Evam pravartitam chakram...*" This yajna is that which has come from the world outside; if I keep it to myself and do not share it with the world, then I will be ruined. Whatever comes from outside should freely go back to the world. That is what it means to be a clear channel. We just become instruments and conduits. The more we love, the more love comes to us. What goes around comes around. If I send out hatred and anger, that is what is going to come back around to me. If I send out love, understanding, and friendship, those are the things that will come back to me. Finally, the third benefit is that we are able to open ourselves to other minds and learn from them instead of remaining walled within our own mind. Having an open mind is very healthy and helpful. If you have one idea and you want to keep it to yourself and do not want to share with others, then you will see that you do not learn anything from the outside world. Keep your mind open, but don't leave the mind so open that your brain falls out! So, keep your mind open, but be aware of the things you allow to enter your mind. You want to allow only positive, healthy thoughts to go into your mind and leave all the junk outside.

So, we have discussed two concepts: (1) my body is a wave and is a part of the ocean of matter, and (2) my mind is a wave and is a part of the cosmic mind. As with the body and mind, spiritual seekers may think of their atman as different from others. Even if we think that there is a spirit or *atma* within me, people might say it is 'my spirit' and 'my *atma*' and that is 'your *atma*.' Along the same lines as before, 'my *atma*' becomes a little wave in the ocean of consciousness, the ocean of Chaitanya. We can apply the same 4 observations. (1) My *atman*-wave is not really different from the ocean of consciousness. (2) My *atman*-wave is kind of different, otherwise why would I call it 'my *atma*?' This little wave of consciousness that got identified with this little body and mind, has now become this wave. (3) This attachment is perishable. All our spiritual practice and our spiritual life is nothing but removing this attachment of this little wave of consciousness with this little body and mind which creates the idea of 'me.' In Sanskrit, the word used for this is '*Jiva*'. It means the infinite consciousness has become 'me,' by being attached to the

body and mind. (4) Once the attachment goes away, it becomes indistinguishable from this ocean of consciousness. This ocean of consciousness is sometimes called ‘*Brahman*’ in books. That is why we read in the Upanishads, ‘*Ayam Atma Brahma.*’ It is one of the *Maha Vakyas* of the Upanishads. It means that this little ‘Atman’ attached with my body and mind is a little wave and it is not different than the infinite ocean of consciousness.

What are the benefits of treating atman as a small wave of the ocean of consciousness? First, when we look at this little atman wave and recognize it as a part of the infinite ocean, this frees us from the disease and illness that is at the root of all illnesses. It is also called ‘the disease of worldliness.’ In Sanskrit we call it as ‘*Bhava Roga*’. ‘*Bhava*’ means that which ‘has become’ the manifested universe — and ‘*Roga*’ means a disease. This disease is the immense diversity created in the mental world. It is created by identifying ourselves as separate from the infinite ocean of consciousness. God is sometimes called ‘*Bhava Roga Vaidya*’, or the doctor who will remove this illness. So, recognizing the atman as a wave of the infinite ocean of consciousness will remove the disease of worldliness. We do not separate ourselves from others simply thinking of the body and mind. But, we separate ourselves from others in several ways, based on religion, caste, culture, race, nationality and build walls around us. There is no limit to this separation. Instead of removing them, people want to build more walls. Unless we remove these barriers, we cannot become truly healthy. Looking at us as waves and part of the ocean will help remove all barriers and make us truly healthy.

Vedanta places before us this great ideal that every one of us has the capacity to be truly healthy. We have that power and all we need to do is to practice it. So how do we practice it and how can we become healthy physically, mentally and spiritually? Leading an honest, truthful and moral life is a must. Having a healthy lifestyle, eating good nourishing food, some amount of physical exercise, exercising the mind, and giving healthy food to the mind are all necessary. When we do that then it is possible to become healthy. I have a handout which shows one kind of practice associated with the three kinds of waves and oceans we talked about. Most of the times, after listening to a few good ideas we go back to our routine work of life and forget to implement these ideas in our life. We should find a way to remind ourselves of these three resolves on daily basis, before beginning the regular day of work. I am very happy that you recited in the beginning of the prayer, “*Tan Me Manah Shiva Sankalpamastu....*” Just as in ritualistic worship, with every intentional activity there should be a ‘Sankalpa’ (resolve) we make to remind ourselves and to focus our mind on what we want to achieve. If we read these three resolves consciously before we begin our daily activities and practice accordingly, then we will see the impact they can have on our way of life.

**Here are the three resolves:**

- 1) Aware of the ocean of the physical world, continuous and unbroken, I realize that the whole world is my body. I resolve to work for the wellbeing of people, animals and plants. I shall share my time, energy and material resources with those who are in need.
- 2) Aware of the ocean of the mental world, continuous and unbroken, I realize that all minds are interconnected. I resolve to work for the happiness of people and animals. I shall not pollute the mental world with hatred, jealousy, egoism and selfishness.
- 3) Aware of the ocean of the spiritual world, continuous and unbroken, I realize that my true self exists in everyone and everything and everyone and everything exist in me. I resolve to make this understanding my own through a sincere intense practice of spiritual life.

If you can, somehow find a way to incorporate this into your daily routine before you begin your work day, and again at the end of the day, when you can once again read this through and ask yourself if you have made an effort to practice this today. Don’t be disheartened if the answer is not always yes. Even the imperfect practice is better than no practice at all. If we know something is good and don’t do anything about it, that is worse than not knowing that at all. Reminding ourselves about these three resolves might

be helpful to all of you. So, without knowing anything about medicine I was able to speak about health for such a long time. Thank you.