

palace and living in a slum with all its filth and privations in order to serve the slum people. Yet this was what Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest lover of mankind that the modern world has produced, did, when he held in abeyance the tendency of his mind to be merged perpetually in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and forced it to live in the state of *bhāvamukha* in order to serve mankind. Thus he was a conspicuous expression of that redeeming power of God which appears

age after age as the Saviour of the *jīvas* in bondage. That is the implication of calling him a Divine Incarnation, as distinguished from a saint who attains to spiritual realization, helps the few who come into contact with him, and finally attains *sāyujya*, the transcendental state.*

* The above article is a section (with minor changes) from 'Sri Ramakrishna, Life and Teachings' by Swami Tapasyananda Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1983.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND HUMAN EXCELLENCE*

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

1. *Introductory*

I am very thankful to the two Vedanta Societies of Harvard University and M.I.T. for inviting me to address you all, assembled in this Emerson Hall of the Harvard University, this evening. Today's subject is, as you see written on the blackboard: *Swami Vivekananda and Human Excellence*. For any educational institution, the subject of human excellence is most inspiring; for what is education except the turning out of batches and batches of human excellence? And the name of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) added to this subject makes it still more excellent, because he himself is a remarkable example of *an all-round human excellence* which I shall try to present before you this evening.

2. *Vivekananda: The Harmony of All Human Energy*

I specially stress this expression: human excellence, because till now, we have been having excellence limited by either country, subject of study, religion, or region; various cultural backgrounds give us different types

of excellence. But Swami Vivekananda will convey to us something very unique, not just Indian excellence or Western Excellence but what we may call *human excellence*; and many writers on Vivekananda, including his great critical and sympathetic French biographer, Romain Rolland, has specially stressed this comprehensive quality of Vivekananda's greatness. Let me quote Romain Rolland's own words from his *Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (p. 310):

'In the two words equilibrium and synthesis Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit: The four yogas in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits, but he himself had been through them all, and embraced them all. As in a quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled

* Based on the Video-taped record of the lecture by Swami Ranganathananda, organized by the Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Vedanta Societies in the Emerson Hall of the Harvard University on 28 May 1985.

towards Unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.'

That is an extraordinary tribute: the harmony of all human energy. He combined within himself the best of East and West. One of my lectures given in London in 1961 is entitled *The Meeting of East & West in Swami Vivekananda* which is included in the second volume of my four-volume *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7, India. What is that type of education by which one achieves a type of excellence where one overcomes these limitations of creed, race, language, and religion? In Vivekananda's life there is that education available to us. How did he achieve this wonderful *human* excellence? That question brings to us the beauty of that type of literature known as biography. When you read the biographies of great people, you learn how they developed their personalities, and the formative influences that went into the shaping of their greatness. In the case of Vivekananda, these formative influences were essentially two—firstly, Indian and secondly, the modern Western. So far as the Indian influences are concerned, these came to him primarily from his five-year discipleship under his great teacher Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886). The deepening of his spiritual awareness, the broadening of his human sympathies, came to him from Sri Ramakrishna. His rational mind and his humanism came to him from his modern Western university education.

He himself was to say later on that the world had two great cultures in the ancient past, which have developed philosophies leading to distinct types of human excellence, distinct types of human greatness—one, the ancient Hindu, which has influenced most of Asia, and the other, the ancient Greek, which has influenced the whole of the West. These two have made very dis-

tinctive contributions to human culture. Each of these two cultures has its own uniqueness. Whatever was achieved by the Greeks, and later on by the Romans, is what we find, in an enlarged form, and with modern science added, in modern Western Culture. Whatever excellences we get in this Western culture is found assimilated in Swami Vivekananda, as he had assimilated the excellences of his own ancient and continuing Indian culture and tradition. And he made a unique discovery, that no culture is perfect, each culture has specialized only in some values and neglected other values due to that very specialization, and all these separate world cultures are essentially aspects of one total human culture and are, therefore, complementary and not mutually exclusive. All this he did by the time he was 29 years of age when he came to this country in 1893, started his great work in the West and in India, and passed away at the early age of 39.

But within this short time, to achieve high character excellence and to make an impact on the minds and attitudes of men and women in two sub-continent, was great work indeed. In Indian history, we have the example of Bhagavān Buddha of the sixth century B.C., who attained enlightenment at the age of about 36, and travelled through many areas of north India and imparted his message to thousands till his death at the age of 80; and his teachings peacefully transformed, in the next few centuries, India and much of Asia. Again, we have another such example in the eighth century A.D. and that was Śaṅkarācārya. Just 32 years of human life; and within that short period, Śaṅkarācārya really shook up India intellectually and spiritually. And in the modern age, India produced this great teacher Swami Vivekananda.

He had a great message to deliver to the modern world, for which he came to this country. He himself had said; Buddha

had a message to the East; and I have a message to the West. And when he returned to India in 1897 he conveyed the same message, but with a different stress, to the people of India during the remaining years of his life, with a brief second visit to the West, and passed away on 4th of July 1902. About four years earlier, while in the company of his American friends and disciples in Kashmir, he had written a poem: *To the Fourth of July* on the occasion of their celebration of American Independence.

What are those essential elements constituting human excellence that shine in him and in his teachings? We can deal with this subject from two points of view. One, from the point of view of human character that one gets from a good education. It is understood that education is meant not only to give us knowledge and information but also to build up our character. Here, in this university, we had a great psychologist like William James, and later, another psychologist William McDougall. Both had laid stress on the character-building component of all true education—physical health and well-being, depth of thought, strength of conviction, faith in oneself, the humanistic impulse, and practical efficiency; all these constitute one type of character-excellence, which, along with the virtue of moderation, is found upheld in Greek culture. William James has written many books, one of which—a thought-provoking one, is: *Varieties of Religious Experience*. One of the books written by McDougall is titled *Character and the Conduct of Life*. It is a beautiful book, but does not seem to be current nowadays; but it was a widely read book in the 20's and 30's of this century. Modern Western education gave this wonderful character-excellence to Swami Vivekananda. Through this he assimilated what he later on would designate as the Greek ideal of 'manliness'. The Greeks laid great stress on these values. Modern Western character

types are essentially derived from this Greek and Roman ideal of manliness, along with some other values gathered in the course of history. It is a type of education imparting character-strength to man to enable one to handle efficiently the world of man and nature around him or her.

This is one aspect of education; but there is also another aspect of education, with greater stress on education of man in depth. These two aspects are highlighted in the post-war period by the UNESCO-appointed commission to investigate the nature of education humanity needs in the post-war period. That commission was presided over by the French Minister of Education, who later on became French Prime Minister, namely, Eduard Faure. And that commission submitted a report after investigating the subject of the current systems of education and the demands of the new human situation in the post-war period. What I am impressed with in that report is in its meaningful title: *Learning to Be*. Till now education has been essentially *learning to do*. But this commission says what the earlier thinkers like William James and McDougall had upheld, that while retaining learning to do, post-war education must add also *learning to be*. *What are you?* is equally, if not more, important than what you do. Thus a new dimension to education is added by that phrase *to be*, along with the current phrase *to do*. What efficiency do we need in today's civilization? It is a highly technical civilization. Education must equip one with tremendous work-efficiency; and work efficiency consists of knowledge and translation of knowledge into action.

3. *The Upaniṣads on Efficiency*

This efficiency is the hall-mark of modern civilization; it is a word that is used again and again. When you go into the literature

of the Upaniṣads, produced over 4000 years ago in India, you get a beautiful definition of efficiency in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (1.1.10):

Yadeva vidyayā karoti, śraddhayā, upaniṣadā, tadeva vīryavattaram bhavati—

‘Whatever is done with *vidyā*, *śraddhā*, and *upaniṣad*, that alone becomes supremely efficient.’

What are these three values? *Vidyā* means science or knowledge. If you want to be efficient you must have knowledge, what we today call the technical know-how of a thing. A nurse must have the technical know-how of nursing. Similarly with a doctor, an executive, an engineer, an administrator, and every other professional. But that is not enough. Mere knowledge of a subject does not make you efficient. So a second value is added: *śraddhā*—faith; here it does not mean faith in a dogma or creed or strongly held opinion, but faith in oneself, the impulse from within: I can, I can, and the conviction that the work you are doing is worthwhile and that here is a meaningfulness to life and to the world. And that faith extends to faith in the other members of the work team also. Śaṅkarācārya therefore defines *śraddhā* as *āstikyabuddhi*—the totality of positive attitudes. This faith and conviction increases all work-efficiency. Vivekananda has said, ‘Great convictions are the mothers of great deeds.’ Behind every great work there is this tremendous power of conviction. The world is shaped and moved by men and women of conviction. This can be contrasted with what we call opinion. We may have opinions on any number of subjects. That does not produce the energy of impact on society. But when opinion is transformed into conviction, you find the manifestation of the energy of impact. A passage in a *Home University Library* book by biologist J. Arthur Thomson: ‘Introduction to Science’,

1934, attracted my attention long ago (p. 22):

“‘Opinions,’ (scientist) Gianville says, “are the rattles of immature intellects, but the advanced reasons have outgrown them.”’

“‘The longer I live,” (Thomas) Huxley said, “the more obvious it is to me that the most sacred act of a man’s life is to say and feel, ‘I believe such and such to be true.’ All the greatest rewards and all the heaviest penalties of existence cling about that act.”’

Political conviction, spiritual convictions, scientific convictions, social convictions—these all have wonderful world-moving power. Hence Swami Vivekananda places great emphasis on this value of *śraddhā*, faith and conviction. The opposite of *śraddhā* is *aśraddhā*, lack of faith, which is what results in cynicism. We are missing this great value of faith in the modern period, with the consequent spread of this evil of cynicism which sets in when the sharpening of intellect is not accompanied by the humanistic passion. The Upaniṣad considers that *vidyā* and *śraddhā* are not enough, that a third value also has to be added to the two in order to achieve supreme efficiency. This is: *Upaniṣad*—deep thinking, meditative thinking on the subject concerned.

Any work that has behind it these three values of *vidyā*, *śraddhā*, and *upaniṣad* alone becomes *vīryavattaram*, of superior energy. *Vīrya* in Sanskrit means energy. The word *taram* in Sanskrit stands for the comparative degree, and *tamam* for the superlative. So superior efficiency will come when we combine with the energy of knowledge the energies of these other two values; this applies to education also. When all these three energies are combined, you get a type of human excellence which has the power to move the world. The educated citizen is the source from which a modern democratic society receives nourishment. That education must include not only intellectual knowledge but also these other two values

as well. Vivekananda had assimilated, and also spoke highly of, this dimension of human excellence developed out of knowledge-seeking in school, college, and university, and from social interactions. The character that comes out of it is, as I earlier indicated, what Vivekananda termed manliness. This whole development takes place at the normal human level without reference to any trans-sensory or mystical dimension.

Vivekananda considered this as one great aspect of human development which was cultivated in ancient Greeko-Roman culture and modern Western culture. He was a great admirer of the character-energy that comes out of this human development, especially the tremendous value of faith in oneself, the daring to overcome all difficulties and establish man's hegemony over his external environment, which no non-human species but only man can struggle for and accomplish. This is the *Promethean* spirit of ancient Greek culture—daring to steal fire from heaven to serve man. Ancient Indian culture also has a similar heroic character in its *Bhagīratha* who brought down the holy Ganges of prosperity and plenty from the Milky Way Galaxy to the earth. The concept of human excellence in ancient Chinese Confucian culture is similar to that of ancient Greek culture. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. Accordingly, this may be called the *political* view of man, of man in a polity, in which even religion is viewed from the political point of view, tending to make it ethnically limited, sense-bound, and communal. Out of this view have arisen all political, economic, and social struggles to improve the lot of man, on the one hand, and aggressive wars and colonial and other forms of exploitation on the other.

4. Greek Specialization in Human Excellence: Its Limitations

But the finest fruit of this view is

humanism, the philosophy and effort to improve the human situation in *this* world. In the words of E. M. Forster's preface to *The Greek View of Life* by Lowes Dickinson:

'Greece hadn't science, it is true, and she had no global commitments, but she encompassed within the tiny circuit of her city states much that affects and afflicts modern man in his relationship to society. And because her writers were intelligent and because they were sensitive, she has been able to send us news on these urgent matters which is still fresh, although it is over two thousand years.'

Vivekananda had also assimilated, through his discipleship under Sri Ramakrishna, the strong and undying elements in India's culture which drew its inspiration initially from the perennial philosophy and spirituality of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, which expounded another dimension of human excellence—beyond the physical and the sensory, beyond the *political*. This philosophy yielded the experience of the *inward spiritual depth dimension* of man, as distinct from that *external political dimension*. It investigated the depth dimensions of the human personality, and in doing so, it investigated not only the phenomenon of life but also the stark phenomenon of death, and did not stop till it had revealed the true nature of man as the immortal and divine Self, the Ātman—'ever pure, ever-illuminated, and ever free', as Śaṅkarācārya characterized it, of which, as the ancient *Ṛg-Veda* expresses it, life and death are but two shadows (X.121.2):

*Ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśva
upāsate praśiṣam yasya devah:
Yasya chāyā amṛtam yasya mṛtyuh
kasmāi devāya haviṣā vidhema—*

'Unto Him who gives us our individuality, who gives us strength, whose commands all beings, together with the gods, obey, whose

shadows are immortality as well as death, we offer our oblations’.

No culture, no philosophy, can achieve depth without tackling the problem of death. This was one of the major drawbacks of ancient Greeco-Roman culture which failed to assimilate to itself the deeper legacy left by Socrates and the Greek Mystery Religions. This may also be said of the modern Western culture which has failed to rationally investigate and assimilate to itself the deep spirituality of the Christian religion. Says Lowes Dickinson (*ibid.*, p. 68):

‘The more completely the Greek felt himself to be at home in the world, the more happily and freely he abandoned himself to the exercise of his powers, the more intensely and vividly he lived in action and in passion, the more alien, bitter and incomprehensible did he find the phenomena of age and death. On this problem, so far as we can judge, he received from his religion but little light and still less consolation. The music of his brief life closed with a discord unresolved; and even before reason had brought her criticism to bear upon his creed, its deficiency was forced upon him by his feeling.’

By their emphasis on inner penetration by their wholehearted advocacy of what the ancient Greeks centuries later formulated in the dictum: ‘Man, know thyself’, but at which they themselves had stopped half way, the Upaniṣads gave an inner strength to the Indian cultural experiment, and a permanent spiritual orientation also to it, and initiated a scientific and non-dogmatic tradition in the field of religion. Also, to adapt E. M. Forster’s remark about the legacy of Greece to the West: ‘much that affects us and afflicts us’ in India, and the countries influenced by Indian culture, is the fruit of this Upaniṣadic orientation. This philosophy yielded the *spiritual* view of man as distinct from, as was stated earlier, the *political* view of man developed by the ancient Greeks. This stress on inward depth had, however, one special consequ-

ence for Indian culture in that all its expansive outward movements throughout history have been, unlike the expansive movements under the *political* view of man, non-aggressive; every word of its message for mankind ‘has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it...and therefore we live’, as remarked by Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol. III, pp. 105-109):

‘The debt which the world owes to our motherland is immense. Civilizations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient and modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another....But, mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. ...Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, many other nations have taught; but India for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist... Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but *every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before it*. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. ...

‘Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was and, mark my word, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious.... India’s gift to the world is the light spiritual.’

The Greeco-Roman and modern Western peoples had achieved a type of human excellence based on this faith in oneself and the promethean spark it ignited in them. With these they have built up a high level of social welfare and the spirit of human individuality and dignity. But Vivekananda

pointed out to the people of the West that this did not exhaust the scope of human excellence, the scope of the science of human possibilities. After presenting India's ancient and ever-perennial philosophy and spirituality of Vedanta to the Western peoples he incited them in a lecture delivered in India in 1897 to shift, in order to evolve a stable and fuller civilization, the basis of their civilization from the sensory and the material to the trans-sensory and the spiritual (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 159):

'The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation. It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword. You will find that the very centres from which such ideas as government by force sprang up are the very centres to degrade and degenerate and crumble to pieces. Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground, and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe is the religion of the Upaniṣads.'

The view of man as a social individual, and the efforts to make that individual happy and content at that sensory level, is legitimate and productive of good in the early stages; but carried too far, it is bound to generate diverse tensions in the individual and society and lead to unfulfilment, *due to the stagnation of human creative energy at the sensate level and arresting the onward movement of that energy to the higher spiritual levels of the human personality.*

Not only is man a member of a social community, not only has he or she a 'political' personality (using that word as the Greeks used it, in the sense of living together in a polity) there is also a second and higher dimension of human development and excellence. That is called the spiritual dimension of human growth and excellence. If the first one is a horizontal and lateral

growth, this second one is a vertical and inward growth. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. This is true; we need that gregarious background for our own growth; but man has a vertical dimension, which calls for a deepening of his awareness, for a spiritual growth within. This is a wonderful truth about man, says Vedanta; it is not a creed or a dogma but a veritable truth which has been realized by many sages in East and West and can be verified by all. Even in ancient Greek culture this higher dimension of excellence was placed before man in the famous dictum of the Oracle of Delphi: 'Man, know thyself.' It is not enough that you know the external environment. There is a profound inner environment also to be investigated and realized.

There was only one great Greek who understood this truth and realized it; and that was Socrates. He realized himself as the infinite and immortal Atman; and the Greeks, who knew only the socio-political dimension of man, the horizontal dimension, could not understand him. It was something beyond their comprehension. They well knew man wrestling with forces outside, and establishing his hegemony over the external world. But the greatness of Socrates was something deep, something subtle. It is a great tragedy that the Athenian state could not appreciate the high spiritual dimension of Socrates; and therefore he was condemned to death. He was described by the judges as a corrupter of the Athenian youth. What a sad description! And what human excellence and greatness! But the socio-political philosophy of the Greeks could not grasp that character excellence. Whenever I take the example of Socrates I refer to Jesus Christ also. Jesus also gave a tremendous message of man's spiritual inwardness. But the socio-political philosophy of the Jews of the time could not comprehend it and condemned him to death. Socio-political character

excellence the Athenians and the Jews could understand and appreciate ; but not anything higher than that. That illustrates the truth of the remark of Bertrand Russell: If you teach people faster than they can learn, you are in for trouble!

5. *Indian Specialization in Human Excellence: Its Limitations*

Vivekananda realized the beauty and relevance of the Greek concept of excellence, and its complementarity with the Indian concept of excellence, treating both as two aspects of human spiritual development. He therefore preached this message of the promethean spirit, of the *bhagiratha* spirit, in India in order to educate his people to achieve that manliness which Western culture has as its special characteristic. He exhorted his people to wake up from their sleep of centuries and to act with courage and with humanist concern to achieve total human development in India in the modern period. He said to the people of India that their nation in the recent centuries had failed because they had faith in gods and goddesses but had not cultivated faith in themselves and in other human beings. He told his countrymen that first one must cultivate faith in oneself ; then only can one have faith in others or faith in God ; there will be dynamism in such a faith. If this primary faith in oneself is not there, faith in others and in God will be unproductive, and one will become weak and ineffective. This is stressed again and again by him in his Indian lectures and in his letters to Indian people. He did not stress this in the Western context. He saw it already present in the people of the West, but he taught them to shift the focus of that faith in oneself from the genetically conditioned ego to the Ātman, the one Divine Self in all.

If what Socrates said was too high and beyond the grasp of his Greek compatriots,

it was perfectly in tune with the teachings of the Upaniṣads of India which were already over a thousand years old by that time. Inspired by a search for truth about man, and endowed with a pure and penetrating mind, the sages of the Upaniṣads, by *āvṛttacakṣu*, or 'turning the unified energies of the psycho-sensory system inward', as the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, (Chapter IV, opening verse) terms it, discovered the infinite man behind the finite man, the immortal man behind the mortal man revealed by sensory cognition. And a galaxy of the Upaniṣadic sages, including Buddha over a thousand years later, re-verified and re-confirmed this truth about man, about the depth dimension of the human personality. We can take it for granted that if Socrates and Jesus had been born in India, they would not only not have been killed but would have been adored and worshipped. The Indian philosophy of Vedānta understands the divine dimension of the human personality over and above his or her socio-political externally-oriented dimension.

But in course of ages, lured by the former, India steadily neglected the latter. The correction of this neglect, which became cruel in later centuries and which dwarfed much of Indian humanity, is the great contribution of Vivekananda to the re-shaping of modern India ; and here he pays his tribute and expresses India's indebtedness to the ancient Greeks and to the people of the modern West.

Introducing the first issue of his Bengali journal *Udbodhan* to the public in January 1899, Vivekananda wrote on *The Problem of Modern India and Its Solution* (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 404):

'What we should have is what we have not, perhaps what our forefathers even had not—that which the *Yavanas* (ancient Greeks) had ; that, impelled by the life-vibration of which, is issuing forth in rapid succession from the great dynamo of Europe, the electric flow of that tremendous

power vivifying the whole world. We want that. We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement. Checking a little the constant looking back to the past, we want that expansive vision infinitely projected forward; and we want that intense spirit of activity (*Rajas*) which will flow through our every vein, from head to foot.'

This stress on modern India assimilating Greek and Western talents and capacities was not meant by Vivekananda to replace India's inherited spiritual talents and capacities but only to fortify them and make for wholeness. India had specialized in investigating and discovering the profound divine mystery lurking within man. You may study man from the outside; but that won't exhaust his possibilities. One of our own French scientists who came towards the end of the last century, Alexis Carrel, has written a book whose title itself is significant: *Man: the Unknown*. Man, the known, is the subject of our physical science while man, the unknown, is the subject of the science of spirituality; this is a more challenging study than the first one. In this science India forged ahead in the Upaniṣads. By discovering the immortal in man and in nature, the Upaniṣads made themselves and the culture they fostered in India also immortal. When you study that immortal literature, you will find that some of the beautiful passages in the utterances of Plato's Socrates can easily be incorporated as chapters in some one or other of our Upaniṣads. Here is one such passage which I particularly like:

Socrates is drinking poison. His disciples are sitting around him weeping. He consoles them and says: Let me die in peace; do not weep. Then one of them, Crito, asks a question to Socrates: Socrates, how shall we bury you? Socrates smiles and says: You must first catch me, *the real me*, before

you ask that question. Be of good cheer, Crito; for you ask about the body; as to the body, do with it what you do with other people.

This can be a fitting passage in any one of our Upaniṣads. It refers to his realization of an eternal and immortal dimension of the human personality. When you realize that truth you become utterly fearless; you become gentle; you become compassionate; you feel your oneness with all. It was that spiritual depth-excellence that Socrates had embodied in himself. Greek culture could not understand this human depth-dimension and therefore could not incorporate it into its classical culture.

The British intellectual, Edward J. Urwick, in his book, *The Message of Plato: A Re-interpretation of the Republic*, has strongly emphasized that without understanding the Vedanta of India, it would be difficult to understand Socrates and much of Plato. Says he in his Preface:

'I have attempted in this book the very bold task of presenting a new interpretation of Plato's teaching, as contained in his masterpiece, *The Republic*. The interpretation is based largely upon the philosophic thought of ancient India—or rather, upon the Indian religious thought since for the Indian sages, as for Plato, philosophy had little meaning except in relation to what we call religion.'

In the first chapter entitled *The Ancestry of Plato's Faith*, Urwick says (pp. 13-14):

'It is usually maintained that the Platonic or Socratic philosophy, like the rest of Greek speculation, was original, indigenous, owing very little to any outside influence. But the quest and life and faith of Socrates were as un-Greek as anything could possibly be; that was one of the reasons why the Greeks killed him; the essence of his life belonged to a world unknown to them and therefore dangerous in their eyes. The Platonic Socrates is never tired of asserting that he stands alone; that he differs from both predecessors and contemporaries in thought, in aim,

in interest, in method, in belief. "I alone among the Athenians hold this view"—that is his constant attitude. ... There is only one "philosopher" whose doctrines, both practical and theoretical, appear to have resembled Plato's in spirit and aim as well as in substance; and that one is Pythagoras. It is noteworthy that Pythagoras is the only great thinker of Greece whom Plato never criticises, but of whom he speaks with the greatest deference and respect ... And in reference to the quest of Socrates, his character and his faith, I will be content to let the resemblance to the quest and character and faith of the ancient Indian sages speak for itself. ... But I affirm very confidently that if any one will make himself familiar with the old Indian wisdom—religion of the Vedas and Upaniṣads, will shake himself free, for the moment, from the academic attitude and the limiting Western conception of philosophy, and will then read Plato's dialogues, he will hardly fail to realize that both are occupied with the selfsame search, inspired by the same faith and drawn upwards by the same vision.'

6. Vivekananda's Education in Total Human Excellence under Sri Ramakrishna

Today, Sri Ramakrishna has purified and strengthened and re-authenticated the age-old spiritual heritage of India and established its kinship with the cultural heritage of Greece and the modern West. Out of their union in his disciple Vivekananda there developed a character excellence, neither specifically Eastern nor Western, but just human and truly universal. It is here that man overcoming all narrowness, intolerance, and violence reaches out to a mankind awareness. When Vivekananda requested Sri Ramakrishna to bless him with long immersion in *samādhi*, Sri Ramakrishna chided him saying: What a small mind is yours! Can't you experience the Divine with eyes open in work and inter-human relations as well as with eyes closed in the trans-social experience of meditation? And Vivekananda did just that and preached just that.

The philosophic and spiritual vision of Advaita or non-duality of the Upaniṣads,

which includes the vision of the unity of the One and the many, and which Sri Ramakrishna imparted to Vivekananda, had a profound impact on the subsequent career of the latter and the history of modern India. For it soon began to translate itself into action with a pervasive sweep, unprecedented in the five-thousand year old history of India. As this Advaita is based on the Ultimate Reality as Brahman-Māyā, as Śiva-Śakti, as the Impersonal-Personal, it also synthesizes the diverse paths of action and contemplation, work and worship, the secular and the sacred, in a comprehensive spirituality. In it the Godward passion pours out also as a manward love and service. 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' said Jesus about the truth or otherwise of man's ideological convictions. Such convictions have produced as history has shown in religious, political and other fields of human life, character-fruits of diverse quality from the sweetest to the bitterest, with any number of strands in between: Pathetic withdrawal or energetic action, pessimistic resignation or optimistic daring, egoistic self-assertion or spiritual self-denial, intolerance or universal acceptance, violence and aggressiveness or non-violence and gentleness, universal love or blind hatred, selfishness and exploitation or renunciation and service—all these are the character-fruits of man's philosophies, well thought-out or ill.

Sri Ramakrishna has coined a new term for this comprehensive philosophic and spiritual vision of Advaita, namely *viñāna*. Explaining the nature of this *viñāna*, Sri Ramakrishna says (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, English translation by Swami Nikhilananda, New York edition 1942, pp. 801-802):

'Both *Lila* (manifestation) and *Nitya* (the Absolute) belong to the same Reality. In one form it is the Absolute and in another, the *Lila*. Even though the *Lila* is destroyed, the *Nitya* always exists. Water is water whether it is still

or in waves ; it is the same water when the waves quiet down. ...

'What does Vedanta teach ? Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. Isn't that so ? But as long as God keeps the "ego of a devotee" in a man, the Relative is also real. When He completely effaces the ego, then what *is* remains. That cannot be described by the tongue. But as long as God keeps the ego, one must accept all. By removing the outer sheaths of the plantain tree, you reach the inner pith. As long as the tree contains sheaths it also contains pith. So too, as long as it contains pith, it also contains sheaths. The pith goes with the sheaths and the sheaths go with the pith. In the same way, when you speak of the *Nitya*, it is understood that the *Lila* also exists ; and when you speak of the *Lila*, it is understood that the *Nitya* also exists. ...

'The devotees—I mean the *vijñānis*—accept both God with form and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Formless, both the Personal God and the Impersonal. In a shoreless ocean—an infinite expanse of water—visible blocks of ice are formed here and there by intense cold. Similarly, under the cooling influence, so to say, of the deep love of Its worshipper, the Infinite reduces Itself to the finite and appears before the worshipper as God with form. Again, as, on the rising of the sun, the ice melts away, so, on the awakening of knowledge, God with form melts away into the same Infinite and Formless.'

The fruit of this *vijñāna* is a character-excellence which signifies the rare synthesis of the virtues and graces of the cultures of East and West. This was the extraordinary achievement in the character and personality of Vivekananda. This explains the unprecedented sweep and range of its energy resources. This alone explains also its tremendous impact during its brief ten-year public ministry, and the silent expansion of that impact all over the world down the years. This is the fruit of that luminous philosophy and spirituality which dared to comprehend, in one sweep, time and eternity, the many and the One.

In the preface to his *Life of Ramakrishna*, Romain Rolland refers to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as 'the splendid symphony of the Universal Soul' (p. 8):

'For a century in new India, Unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung from her sacred earth, a veritable Ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same—human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen, Unity itself has expanded and gained in precision.

'From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes whom we shall survey later, I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because, with incomparable charm and power, they have realized this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are, if one may say so, its Mozart and its Beethoven—*Pater Seraphicus* and Jove the thunderer—Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.'

Vivekananda who sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna had earlier assimilated the best of modern Western thought through his education at the Calcutta University. India had been brought in touch with modern Western culture through her British political connection. But that political connection was a temporary connection. Yet India's contact with Western culture through that connection did not end with the ending of the political connection in 1947. Vivekananda taught India to assimilate this Western culture. All through history, except during the past eight centuries, the mood of Indian culture has been one of acceptance. Nowhere in the non-Western world will you find that appreciation, intelligent and hearty, of Western culture and Western literature as you find in India. Through that appreciation comes a conscious and deliberate effort at assimilation of Western cultural values, in the full knowledge that the socio-political excellence of Western culture is not only not contradictory, but is truly complementary to the spiritual excellence upheld in Indian culture. This is revealed in a unique phenomenon in modern India—the intimate relationship of Sri Ramakrishna, the very embodiment of the spiritual heritage of India, with Narendra, the pre-monastic name of Vivekananda, an

embodiment of Western culture. Out of that five-year relationship of the two, emerged Vivekananda, whom more than one writer has described as a synthesis of East and West. Romain Rolland, who described him as 'the harmony of all human energy', as quoted earlier, also says (*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 192):

'I shall try to show how closely allied is the aspect of Vivekananda's thought to our own, with our special needs, torments, aspirations, and doubts, urging us ever forward like a blind mole, by instinct, upon the road leading to the light. Naturally, I hope to be able to make other Westerners, who resemble me, feel the attraction that I feel for this elder brother, the son of Ganges, who, of all modern men, achieved the highest equilibrium between the two diverse forces

of thought and was one of the first to sign a treaty of peace between the two forces eternally warring within us—the forces of reason and faith.'

No two persons in history, brought together into an intimate relationship, have ever been more dissimilar in body and mind than Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath. Yet they found a deeper point of union of souls between themselves. After passing through the modern education, which the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* calls *aparā-vidyā*, ordinary or positivistic science given in the Calcutta University, Vivekananda went to Sri Ramakrishna to complete his education in the university of what the Upaniṣad calls the *parā-vidyā*, 'the higher science'—the science of man in depth.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S INTERACTIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY

(Illustrated)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Despite the Second Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism (1964) referring to members of other communions as 'separated brethren', rather than as heathens or persons outside the Church, the climate of the Christian world today is perhaps not yet congenial enough to fully appreciate the Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna's adventures into the domain of Christian experience. Orthodox people sometimes question whether Sri Ramakrishna had really become a Christian or had gone through a Christian experience of God at all. Some even question whether one can truly have an experience of God without the rites of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Such questions cannot, however, nullify the historic facts of Sri Ramakrishna's successful

experiments in the verification of God in different religions. In the context of today's strife-torn society and religious dissension these pluralistic experiments are of historic importance. And no one concerned with human welfare can afford to ignore them.

Sri Ramakrishna is unique and so is his life-story in the history of hagiography. Scholars of various shades of opinion may debate on what made him unique, but none can question that he was a man of singularly pure and noble character and that he was a mystic par excellence, having repeatedly had direct and immediate experience of God through various religious disciplines, indigenous and foreign. A master of religious experiences, the child-like and simple Sri Ramakrishna had a passion for God,