

# SPEAK YOUR WORD, VIVEKANANDA

*(A dialogue and discourse)*

SWAMI PARAHITANANDA

## I

The Great Mother is rising,  
we the young people are stirring,  
the world is waiting.  
Our ferry has cast off from the shore of servitude,  
but where is the shore of meaningful freedom ?  
Programmes and policies are not the destination,  
though they may help us to reach the destination.  
Speak, Ferryman ; speak to our condition  
— Vivekananda, Vivekananda.

I spoke, but you were busy with your toys ;  
I spoke, but you had your own ideas ;  
I breathed a flame, but the wood was wet ;  
I wanted you to go beyond the ' isms ', but you  
only invented new ones. I spoke, of course,  
before the time, but my speaking was timely  
in preparing the time  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

True, Swamiji, our hearts have not bled for the poor ;  
we have not wiped a single widow's tears ;  
we threw a coin to a beggar-boy : we did not  
place it in his hand. We looked at a woman,  
and forgot we were looking at God  
— Vivekananda, Vivekananda.

My word is not my word, but I speak it again to you ;  
my life is not my life, but I will live a thousand  
for you ; My life is in my words, but it is not my words.  
My words came on spur of need and mood and moment, yet  
those moments together were spurred by nothing momentary.

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\*In this piece the words ascribed to Swami Vivekananda are not for the most part his own. Its purpose is to bring to bear on the situation today and questions raised such of his particular teachings as are most relevant, at the same time suggesting the general spirit of his teaching and fire of his personality. To cover the same ground by means of quotations only would be a much more lengthy proceeding. The piece is, therefore, an attempt at both distillation and creative interpretation. Whether in its balance and emphasis it is true to Swamiji is for the reader to judge.

Vivekananda is not a person, but the precious Mother's sphinx-like life. No punditry alone will find my total meaning out ; no preconceived ideas of saint or sage will open windows on the secret of my life  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

We are waiting, Swamiji, to hear your word.  
— I am waiting for you to be ready to hear my word.  
Switch off the radio, sister. Give your newspaper to the pavement-mother to lie on, brother.  
Only the silent hear : is that not clear ?  
Hush the endless chatter that hides from you your hollow life  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

The Higher Law is roughly this : eternal faith in Self, in all ; the mother's heart and hero's will concerned for others' good ; self-forgetfulness, self-remembrance ; the knowledge and surrender that forge invincible strength ; throne-shaking love of God, soul-drift in God ; sameness of knowledge and love ; to be still, and still moving. It is *karma*, *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *dhyāna* ; one or more, but best if all, of these. What more is there to say ?  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

Can we riddle these riddles, Swamiji ?  
Plainer, fuller speech there needs must be.  
— Yes, there was no waste of words just now.  
I spoke at length before ; in the books it will all be found. And then there is another thing : the time for much speaking has passed by. The time is now to be and do.  
Mark me well : the truth has to be won.  
It is not such as can be served up predigested save God Himself serve it. Sacrifice and suffering are the school where we make the truth our own.  
We are here to learn that we do not have to be here ; to learn that the happiest, freest mundane life is prison compared to what we have it in us to achieve. Do you hear me ?  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

We are trying to be quiet, Maharaj, to hear your word.  
Brother has turned off the TV. In his reflective moments he can see it quickens that craving for excitement which is suicidal to satisfying life.

Sister has cancelled her tryst in the park : when Death keeps tryst with her, she will have to cancel all that sort of thing. When he snatches these props from us — mother, father, sweetheart, friend—will they not end as mother, father, sweetheart, friend ? If we are not to be for ever tied to this turning wheel of death and birth, we shall some time have to find our joy in God or Self alone. If some time, why not now ?  
—Vivekananda, Vivekananda.

At least this wisdom you have grasped, you — sinners No, but children of immortal bliss. Through every change of circumstance hold on to it. To really feel like that is to be moving to a life that is not imitation life, to a life that is not prey to every whim of destiny. But understand my viewpoint well : it is not your world of mother, father, sweetheart, friend, of sea and mountain, song and dance, 'tis not that world I criticize. The joys of the world are not wrong : they are not enough ; all too easily they turn to deepest sorrow. Marriage is not wrong, but I must be married to all the women of the world, for each one has her special charm were one refined enough to see it. And every man must be my husband, lest I miss the joy that even the lowliest man gives to the woman who loves him. And every daughter must be my daughter, and every son my son, for I, in my relational being, am as near infinite as finite can be, and nearly infinite's my appetite for love of every shade. I put the matter thus to show that that high state to which I lead is something altogether positive : to possess the universe and everything in oneself— not everything as everything, but everything by being the being and basis of everything. It is a desirelessness that is not emptiness but perfect fullness. From what I've said, do not conclude our aim is best described as infinite joy. To describe is to limit and eventually distort. Our aim is freedom —freedom from ignorance, which is what limits us. Also, you must remember that these limited loves have to be transcended if we are to reach Love that does not die. By renunciation alone has anyone ever gained the goal supreme  
—brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

If you reflect, renunciation of the real is not possible. So renouncing means, and only can mean, renouncing all that is unreal, all that ignorance makes us see. Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Ramakrishna—their teaching taken at its highest tension is :  
Renounce. In renunciation lies fullness of life. Here is the bitter-sweet, the supreme paradox, of life. The man who loses his life for truth's sake saves it, and he alone  
—brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

Swamiji, permit us to interrupt. We see what you are driving at. You tell us we shall find happiness and freedom in the Infinite alone. But you, or we at least, are finite beings. To seek the Infinite in the finite, is not that the way for us, and only possible way ? If, as you admit, the world is not evil in itself, why not go by means of it, rather than try to cross the world by treading on it, and risk being trodden in the process ? Indeed, is our purpose really what the *sādhu* thinks it is, to cross this so-called sea of *māyā* ? Should not our aim be proportioned to our human nature ? Does not the truth for us lie in accepting our limitations and playing our part creatively in the Cosmic Drama ?  
—Vivekananda, Vivekananda.

When doubts so deep come from the heart, that is, are not of dilettante breed, my gladness grows expressive. The matters that we now discuss cannot be threshed out in any facile way. To persevering study, tempered life, long brooding, the deeper things of life reveal themselves in their vitality. I shall take your doubts, flash lights on them, and leave the rest to you  
—brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

*First*, the Infinite cannot be realized in the finite. Only the Infinite can realize the Infinite, and then there is no finite. If man were a created being through and through, to realize the Infinite he would have to become infinite, which is impossible. The fact is, essentially man is infinite ; incidentally, and in a manner of speaking, he is finite. Therefore, to realize the Infinite he has only to remove the finite, which is ignorance, and know what he already is.

Any experience of the Infinite in the finite is at best a glimpse. Not that a glimpse is to be scorned—far from it. Just a glimpse can change the man, supposing he is able to contain it. Nor do I mean to reduce things so recondite to black and white, seeing that Mother's ways are past all finding out. But our efforts are more likely to be fruitful if thought of as intended to bring us to forgetfulness of all that is not God or Self, of all that is finite.

*Second*, if, by what you say, you mean that you will make the finite the means to the Infinite, I have no objection provided you bear in mind the point just made, that the finite has finally to be forgotten at the time of one's intensest life, the time of contemplation.

*Third*, to say we should accept our limitations and lovingly join in the World-Sport, assumes that man is limited, that man is only man, which, as I've said, is not the case. You cling to these limitations because you think the monist's Absolute is an abstraction. There you are mistaken. These sensations and affections, vivid as they are, are no more than readings, abstract and attenuated, of that Absolute—not the reverse. When you get a glimpse, then your doubt of this will go.

*Fourth*, do I set too high an aim? To gain Freedom is a hard task, for sure. We should not, for that reason, tamper with the truth, adjusting our plan for man to the measure of our understanding. We must see the purpose of his life in the truest light we can. If our efforts fall short, nothing of good in them will run to waste. In the next life we shall climb from the rung we reached in this. The Author of the scriptures is the Sportsman of the Sport we glibly talk about. It is His wont to say, Come to Me. He does not usually say, Enjoy My creation, for if He did so He would make mockery of all those millions bustee-born.

*Fifth*, coming back now to discussion of the mountain path, a word about those virtues—poverty, chastity, and obedience—which seem to be negations. I trust you see that they are negative only to an uninstructed mind. You must also not forget that what we think and do greatly depends on what we

thought and did in this and former lives. The intenser human pleasures and affections form in the subconscious mind habits of thought so stubborn that it is a long war to give them higher direction. Without sublimation there is no realization. By conversion of the lower energies into higher ones, man gains the capacity for realization, given the grace of God. Hence the necessity for restraint.

*Last*, the question remaining to be settled is : how steep should be the path by which we strive to reach the summit ? To this the answer must depend upon the person who aspires to make the climb. Krishna, Shankara, Ramakrishna — all were cautious in advising *sannyāsa*. To very few they counselled the path which you describe as treading on the world. For the vast majority, *sannyāsa* is not the road which lies immediately ahead. But let us not on that account hide this unfitness under specious arguments  
— brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters.

(To be concluded)

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## SILENCE

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

SPIRITUALITY is not just a theory or a remote ideal. It is a transformation of consciousness that is possible for each one of us ; for divinity is latent within each person and only needs to be awakened. There have been great souls who could transmit spiritual consciousness to others and awaken the divine power within them even in silence, but such souls are rare. I have had the blessed fortune to witness that great power in my master, Swami Brahmananda. People would come to see him day after day, bringing with them their problems or questions. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) would not have to talk about God ; perhaps he would not talk at all. Yet when these people left his presence they would find their problems or doubts removed and their minds uplifted. In one of his prayers Shankara has described a pen-picture of such a spiritual teacher : A young guru is sitting in silence under a tree, surrounded by his aged

disciples. The disciples are old because their superstitions and inhibitions are the result of many lives, but the guru is youthful because the truth of God is ever young and fresh. In silence the disciples' doubts are resolved and the truth of God is revealed to them.

Silence as a spiritual ideal implies both the supreme knowledge of the Godhead and the means by which we can attain that highest goal. True silence is the stilling of the mind, bringing the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious levels of the mind under control and focussing the mind on God. Often, however, people misunderstand the nature of silence and its practice. I once knew a so-called holy man who had taken a vow of silence ; yet he carried a slate with him, and when anyone asked him a question, whether spiritual or mundane, he would write down his answer ! Merely to stop speaking does not bring one to God-realization.