

## **Shraddha**

We have studied the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter on ‘Three-fold division of Shraddha’ in the Bhagavad Gita. But I felt I must explain this divine Shraddha a bit more. Ever since we had the classes on the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter, I have been dwelling on this Shraddha. By constantly dwelling on Shraddha, by thinking about it repeatedly, my whole mind has become filled with Shraddha. The more I think about it, waves of Shraddha rise up in my mind. Miraculous power is lodged within this word Shraddha. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna has touched upon this idea of Shraddha wherever it was necessary and appropriate. Wasn’t that enough to explain the importance of this concept? Why then did he dedicate one whole chapter to this amazing concept of Shraddha? That was because he was God himself. He alone knew the supreme value of Shraddha. It is on this Shraddha that he has established this entire universe. Shraddha is an incredible power that is working incognito, behind the scenes, as it were, in this entire universe.

Impelled by the power of Shraddha, man plumbs the depths of the ocean. Impelled by the power of Shraddha, man goes to outer space and explores the moon. It was impelled by Shraddha that Mahavira jumped across the ocean in one shot. Such indeed is the power of Shraddha. Do you seek success in this world? Become endowed with Shraddha. Do you seek spiritual achievements? Become endowed with Shraddha. Why? It is Shraddha that brings success to us, whatever be the field of our endeavor. Sri Ramakrishna asks us to believe in the words of the Guru; we need to execute what the Guru orders us to do. Just as a person holds onto a pillar and rotates around it, we need to hold onto the Guru’s orders and live in this world. This is what Sri Ramakrishna says. To rotate around the pillar means to be involved with the world; to hold on to the pillar means believing the advice given by the Guru. If we rotate while holding onto the pillar, we don’t have the fear of falling down; similarly, if we believe in the words of the Guru and work out his words in our life, we won’t fall down in life; this is the meaning of Sri Ramakrishna’s advice.

Look at the following conversation recorded in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in this connection:<sup>1</sup>

A Devotee: “Then what is the way for a householder?”

Master: “Faith in the guru's words. You should depend on his instruction. Do your duties in the world, holding fast to his words, like a person whirling round and holding fast to a pillar.”

“What can one not achieve through simple faith! Once there was an annaprasana ceremony in a guru's house. His disciples volunteered, according to their powers, to supply the different articles of food. He had one disciple, a very poor widow, who owned a cow. She milked it and brought the guru a jar of milk. He had thought she would take charge of all the milk and curd for the festival. Angry at her poor offering, he threw the milk away and said to her, ‘Go and drown yourself.’ The widow accepted this as his command and went to the river to drown herself. But God was pleased with her guileless faith and, appearing before her, said: ‘Take this pot of curd. You will never be able to empty it. The more curd you pour out, the more will come from the pot. This will satisfy your teacher.’ The guru was speechless with amazement when the pot was given to him. After hearing from the widow the story of the pot, he went to the river, saying to her, ‘I shall drown myself if you cannot show God to me.’ God appeared then and

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<sup>1</sup> *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: Entry on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1881

there, but the guru could not see Him. Addressing God, the widow said, ‘If my teacher gives up his body because Thou dost not reveal Thyself to him, then I too shall die.’ So God appeared to the guru — but only once.”

“Now you see, because of faith in her guru the disciple herself had the vision of God and also showed Him to her teacher. Therefore I say, ‘Even though my guru frequents a grog-shop, still to me he is the embodiment of Eternal Bliss.’”

We must look at the amazing manner in which Sri Ramakrishna explains the greatness of Shraddha here in this story. It doesn’t matter what sort of a person the Guru is; if there is incredible sincerity in the disciple, his own success is certain. Every man’s success is directly proportional to the sincerity he brings in.

Sri Ramakrishna says one more thing, which is very relevant here. He says<sup>2</sup>, “A man must have some kind of faith before he undertakes a work. Further, he feels joy when he thinks of it. Only then does he set about performing the work. Suppose a jar of gold coins is hidden underground. First of all a man must have faith that the jar of gold coins is there. He feels joy at the thought of the jar. Then he begins to dig. As he removes the earth he hears a metallic sound. That increases his joy. Next he sees a corner of the jar. That gives him more joy. Thus his joy is ever on the increase.” Similarly, first of all we must have **faith** that God **exists**. We must have **faith** in the fact that God is Blissful. We must have faith in the fact that God is All-powerful. Only then will we have enthusiasm in our Sadhana. Only then will we approach our Sadhana joyfully.

Sri Ramakrishna points out a vital issue in this connection. He says, “A man thinks of God, no doubt, but he has no faith in Him. Again and again he forgets God and becomes attached to the world. It is like giving the elephant a bath; afterwards he covers his body with mud and dirt again.” Then he adds, “Man has no faith in God. That is the reason he suffers so much. They say that when you plunge into the holy waters of the Ganges your sins perch on a tree on the bank. No sooner do you come out of the water after the bath than the sins jump back on your shoulders.” What does this mean? These sins know the mind of man very well. Once in a blue-moon, men remember God. When he does that, we shall stay hidden a little away from him. Very soon, men will forget God and become their old selves. We shall then return to our positions on their shoulders and ride around with them!

Sri Ramakrishna says that if we take the name of God with intense faith, these sins **must** vanish from our presence. The most important thing required is Shraddha. “One should have such burning faith in God that one can say: ‘What? I have repeated the name of God, and can sin still cling to me? How can I be a sinner anymore? How can I be in bondage anymore?’”<sup>3</sup> This is the kind of faith needed, says Sri Ramakrishna. He explains very humorously, “Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*: Entry on Monday, October 26, 1885;

Also see *ibid*: Entry on Monday, December 24, 1883 for another version of this same illustration: Sri Ramakrishna says, “If a man hears that a jar filled with gold is buried at a certain place, he rushes there and begins to dig. He sweats as he goes on digging. After much digging he feels the spade strike something. Then he throws away the spade and looks for the jar. At the sight of the jar he dances for joy. Then he takes up the jar and pours out the gold coins. He takes them into his hand, counts them, and feels the ecstasy of joy. Vision-touch-enjoyment. Isn't it so?”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*: Entry on Sunday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1883: Master: “Assume the tamasic aspect of bhakti. Say with force: ‘What? I have uttered the names of Rama and Kali. How can I be in bondage anymore? How can I be affected by the law of karma?’”

Also see *ibid*: Entry on Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup> 1882: “One must take the firm attitude: ‘What? I have chanted the Mother’s name. How can I be a sinner anymore? I am Her child, heir to Her powers and glories.’”

The worldly-minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by His will; but it is not their inner belief. Do you know what a worldly man's idea of God is like? It is like the children's swearing by God when they quarrel. They have heard the word while listening to their elderly aunts quarreling. Do you know what the God of worldly people is like? It is like children's saying to one another while at play, 'I swear by God.' They have learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts or grandmothers. Or it is like God to a dandy. The dandy, all spick and span, his lips red from chewing betel-leaf, walks in the garden, cane in hand, and, plucking a flower, exclaims to his friend, 'Ah! What a beautiful flower God has made!' But this feeling of a worldly person is momentary. It lasts as long as a drop of water on a red-hot frying-pan." Thus Sri Ramakrishna explains the absence of Shraddha in most of the people.<sup>4</sup>

Shraddha is too vital an idea for man. In order to elaborate this extremely important idea in all its aspects, Sri Krishna had to dedicate one full chapter to Shraddha in his Gita. The Vedas and Upanishads too have, repeatedly, explained and elaborated this Shraddha in appropriate places.

The Prashna Upanishad<sup>5</sup> describes that the Lord created the all-powerful Prana and simultaneously created Shraddha. Just as we can control Prana through Pranayama and gain access to infinite power, similarly, we can develop the small spark of Shraddha that is already within us, and through that fully manifested Shraddha, we can obtain whatever we want in life.

The Chandogya Upanishad speaks of the Sanatkumara-Narada conversations.<sup>6</sup> Narada approaches Sanatkumara and unburdens his heart to him. His pain is this – he is well versed in Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda, Itihasa, Puranas, vyakarana, Pitrya, Ganita, Daiva, Siddhishastra, Tarkashastra, Nitishastra, Nirukta, Shiksha, Kalpa, Chandas, Bhutavidya, Dhanurvedya, Jyotisha, Sarpavidya, Devajanavidya – yet, his mind was sorrowful, and he has no joy in his heart. He pleads with Sanatkumara to teach him that which will remove the misery of his heart. Sanatkumara then advises him to perform Upasana on words, and then on speech. Similarly, he guides Narada to do Upasana on mind, determination, memory, prana, truth, etc. When Narada was asked to obtain the knowledge of the truth, he asks as to how he will do so. Sanatkumara replies that when a man sees reality as it is, he will be able to know the truth. One who does not see reality, as it is, one who does not understand the truth, will not be able to know the truth. Therefore one should develop an understanding of the truth. Narada then asks Sanatkumara to teach him understanding. Sanatkumara replies that when a man reflects, he will develop understanding. Hence one ought to develop the faculty of reflection. Narada then requests him to teach

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*: Entry on October 19, 1884;

Also see *ibid*: Entry on Saturday, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1883: Sri Ramakrishna said: "The spiritual wisdom of worldly people is seen only on rare occasions. It is like the flame of a candle. No, it is rather like a single ray of the sun passing through a chink in a wall. Worldly people chant the name of God, but there is no zeal behind it. It is like children's swearing by God, having learnt the word from the quarrels of their aunts. Worldly people have no grit. If they succeed in an undertaking, it is all right, but if they don't succeed, it scarcely bothers them at all.

Also see *ibid*: Entry on Saturday, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1883: "Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk. The worldly-minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by His will; but it is not their inner belief. Do you know what a worldly man's idea of God is like? It is like the children's swearing by God when they quarrel. They have heard the word while listening to their elderly aunts quarreling."

Also see *ibid*: Entry on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1885: "One cannot understand the joy of God unless one has tasted it. Can anybody explain sex pleasure to a five-year-old boy? Worldly people talk about God only from hearsay. Children, hearing their old aunts quarrelling among themselves, learn to say, 'There is my God', 'I swear by God.'"

<sup>5</sup> *Prashna Upanishad*: I:10

<sup>6</sup> *Chandogya Upanishad*: Part-VII

him reflection. Sanatkumara says that when a man develops Shraddha, he becomes capable of reflection. One who lacks Shraddha cannot reflect. Hence one ought to develop Shraddha. Narada then begs him to teach him how to develop Shraddha. Sanatkumara says Shraddha develops from singlemindedness. One who lacks singlemindedness can never develop Shraddha. Narada then asks that he be taught singlemindedness. Sanatkumara replies that he who performs his duties develops singlemindedness. One who does not perform one's duties can never develop singlemindedness. Narada naturally asks Sanatkumara to teach him how to perform one's duties. Sanatkumara replies by saying that when a man understands that he will get joy by doing something, he will do it. If a man finds that he will not get joy by doing something, he will never be able to do it. Hence one ought to know joy. Narada therefore asks him to teach him about joy. To that, Sanatkumara famously replies, "Yo vai Bhooma tat sukham; na alpe sukham asti." That which is 'Bhooma', that alone is joy; there is no joy in the 'Alpa', the finite. 'Bhooma' is that which is infinite, the largest, the greatest. The infinite is indeed what we all know as 'God'. There is nothing that is larger than, or greater than God. Hence, obtaining God alone is the source of joy. If one gets anything less than God, one doesn't get joy – 'na alpe sukham asti' – this is the confirmed view of Sanatkumara.

We may now summarize this rather long discussion between Narada and Sanatkumara as follows: Shraddha, singlemindedness, and performing one's duties – one can obtain the Infinite only by means of these three. In this unique manner does the Chandogya Upanishad sing the glory of Shraddha.

Then there is the Mahanarayana Upanishad.<sup>7</sup> There, the utility of Shraddha is depicted in yet another amazing manner.

Shraddhaayaam praane nimishtomritam juhomi; Shraddhaayaam apaane nimishtomritam juhomi;  
Shraddhaayaam vyaane nimishtomritam juhomi; Shraddhaayaamudaane nimishtomritam juhomi;  
Shraddhaayaam samaane nimishtomritam juhomi;

These mantras are uttered during the time of taking food. What these mantras mean is this:

With supreme Shraddha, I offer this nectar called food to Praana; With supreme Shraddha, I offer this nectar called food to Apaana; With supreme Shraddha, I offer this nectar called food to Vyaana; With supreme Shraddha, I offer this nectar called food to Udaana; With supreme Shraddha, I offer this nectar called food to Samaana;

Our body has these five life-forces – Praana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udaana and Samaana. These are the primary energies in the body. This Prana is the manifested form of God. If the food we eat has to be properly assimilated in our body, we need the grace of these five pranas or life-forces. Therefore, before we start eating, we offer five bits of food, symbolically, as offerings to these five pranas, and then we pray: Brahmane ma atmaamritatvaaya; which means – through these five offerings or oblations, may my 'self' get merged with the Infinite and thereby become immortal. We need to observe a very interesting feature of this prayer or ritual. We all feel hungry as long as we are alive, and we have to keep eating food in order to quench this hunger. This is perpetual among living beings. But, if we can utilize this daily affair as a spiritual practice, we quench our hunger as well as get spiritual benefit from it! Just imagine the genius of our ancestors who discovered that something every one of us has to do every day, all our lives,

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<sup>7</sup> *Mahanarayana Upanishad*: Ch-29

can be done with supreme shraddha and be converted into the highest spiritual practice! Thereafter, before we proceed further with our eating, we utter ‘Amritopastaramasi’ and drink a sip of water. What this means is – may this water be a comfortable seat for the food that I shall put into my stomach, which is but the Infinite in one of its myriad forms. Whatever we consider as important, sacred or holy, we place it on a suitable cushion or pedestal or altar. Here, we are putting the most sacred God himself in the form of food into our stomach. The cushion for this ‘God in the form of food’ is the water sanctified by the mantra ‘Amritopastaramasi’. After this, we prayerfully offer the food to the five life-forces or Pranas: Shraddhaayaam praane nimishtomritam juhomi; shivo ma vishapradahaaya; praanaaya svaha. Shraddhaayaamapaane nimishtomritam juhomi; shivo ma vishapradahaaya; apaanaaya svaha. Shraddhaayaam vyaane nimishtomritam juhomi; shivo ma vishapradahaaya; vyaanaaya svaha. Shraddhaayaamudaane nimishtomritam juhomi; shivo ma vishapradahaaya; udaanaaya svaha. Shraddhaayaam samaane nimishtomritam juhomi; shivo ma vishapradahaaya; samaanaaya svaha. This food that I offer to these five life-forces or pranas, may this food be properly digested and assimilated by my body and be beneficial to me. Then we start eating the food. Before we end, we utter ‘Amritaapidaanamasi’ and drink one sip of water. This sanctified water is the covering for the ‘God in the form of food’ that I have just now ingested into my stomach. Then we utter the following mantras: Shraddhaayaam praane nivishyaamritagam hutam; praanamannenaapyayasva. Shraddhaayaamapaane nivishyaamritagam hutam; apaanamannenapyayasva. Shraddhaayaam vyaane nivishyaamritagam hutam; vyaanamannenapyayasva. Shraddhayamudane nivishyamritagam hutam; udanamannenapyayasva. Shraddhayam samane nivishyamritagam hutam; samanamannenapyayasva. With supreme Shraddha and with great affection, I have offered this ‘God in the form of food’ to my prana life-force; may this food energize my life-force called prana. With supreme Shraddha and with great affection, I have offered this ‘God in the form of food’ to my apana life-force; may this food energize my life-force called apana. With supreme Shraddha and with great affection, I have offered this ‘God in the form of food’ to my vyana life-force; may this food energize my life-force called vyana. With supreme Shraddha and with great affection, I have offered this ‘God in the form of food’ to my udana life-force; may this food energize my life-force called udana. With supreme Shraddha and with great affection, I have offered this ‘God in the form of food’ to my samana life-force; may this food energize my life-force called samana.

So, before starting eating, we said that we would, with supreme shraddha offer oblations to the five life-forces; and at the end, we said that we have indeed offered the oblations as promised. Then we prayed that these oblations (now, it is no longer ‘my food’, but instead it has become ‘offerings to the life-forces’!) go on to strengthen my life-forces. Just observe the mind becoming imbued with shraddha during the entire process.

How is it to gobble up the food as soon as it is served, like the glutton Bakasura,<sup>8</sup> and going to our duties in the office or factory? How is this process of bringing in shraddha into the entire process and offering ‘God in the form of food’ as oblations to ‘God in the form of life-force’ within this body? You may raise a question here: whatever be the exact process – eating as offering oblations to God within us, or gobbling it up in a hurry – isn’t the end result the same? In both cases, hunger is quenched; body gets energy. What is the difference? The five Pandavas also ate food; the glutton Bakasura also ate food. Both had powerful bodies; but what a difference in their mentalities! Where does this difference in mentality come from? The food we eat does not just create our physical body; it goes on to create our mind too. So,

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<sup>8</sup> **Bakasura** is a demon of the forests that we encounter in Mahabharata; he was a glutton, who was also a cannibal.

when we eat this food, which goes on to create both our physical body and our mind, we need to associate that food, and the process of eating it, with virtues such as Shraddha. If we do this, along with nourishing our body and mind, we get imbued with Satvika<sup>9</sup> mental tendencies and Satvika energies. These Satvika mental tendencies and energies are indispensable for spiritual growth and for peace of mind. Thus, when the daily activity of eating our food has such a deep impact on our personality, would it be wise to gossip while eating? Or use vulgar words? Or express anger? Or discuss politics? Or carp against our neighbors? If we do these things while eating food, we must understand the secret that, very quickly, our mind will get polluted. If you wish to establish this truth by experiment, you may try to irritate a boy in your house every day while he eats his food, for a few days. Just observe if he becomes a short-tempered guy or not, very soon, in fact, in a matter of days! Keeping all these various ideas in mind, Sri Krishna had to dedicate one full chapter to this vital concept of Shraddha.

By now, one more question might have cropped up in your mind. We don't even know all these mantras which we need to utter while eating our food. What then will be our fate? I answer this with a question of my own – do those who know these mantras, utter them with supreme shraddha when they eat? Even if one knows the mantras by heart, if one doesn't know their meaning, they will never have the shraddha to utter them in the proper way at the proper time. Even if you utter these mantras mechanically while eating, without knowing their meaning, no special benefit will accrue to you. So, to eat your food with the right mentality, you don't need to necessarily know these mantras. You don't need mantras to feel that you are offering your food as oblations to the five life-forces within you. Or, you may imagine that you are offering food to your Ishta Deva residing in your own heart, and you don't need any separate mantra for doing that. We must remember the main drift of the argument here: when we eat food, we must do so with a mind filled with Shraddha, with all positive thoughts at the forefront of our mind.

While the Mahanarayana Upanishad elaborates the exact procedure by which we ought to eat food, the Taittiriya Upanishad<sup>10</sup> has another wonderful message for us in this matter of Shraddha. It says, “Shraddhayaa deyam, ashaddhayaa adeyam.” Give with Shraddha, don't give with a lack of Shraddha. During the old days of Gurukula Education system in our country, when the students were released from their Gurukulas upon completion of education, Guru would impart some very specific instructions to their students. There was a standard format to those convocation addresses. It is called ‘Acharya Upadesha’. This set of instructions contain the famous ‘May your mother be God to you, may your father be God to you, may your teacher be God to you.’ It implies that we ought to have a worshipful attitude towards our parents and teachers, for Shraddha implies a worshipful attitude. In the course of giving instructions, the Guru tells these words, ‘Give with Shraddha, and don't give with a lack of Shraddha.’ What ‘giving’ are they talking of here? It could be anything – things, service, help, advice, etc. ‘Giving’ is therefore a part of every person's daily routine. You may not give large donations of money, but don't you serve food to others at home? Don't you give service to your customers in your business? All these forms of ‘giving’ are included in this advice – Give with Shraddha. Notice one interesting thing here: it says ‘Give with Shraddha’; it also spells out the opposite, ‘Don't give with a lack of Shraddha.’ When we have said the positive thing, why spell out its opposite? When we say, ‘Do something’, doesn't it imply ‘Don't do the opposite’? There is a deep psychological reason for the Upanishad Gurus to do so. The act of giving very

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<sup>9</sup> Composition of the entire creation is conceived of using three qualities by ancient Indians. They are **Sattva, Rajas, & Tamas**. Sattva is that quality that leads to unification, to Oneness; Rajas is that quality that leads to multiplicity, to differentiation; Tamas is that quality that leads to inertness, to apparent absence of life.

<sup>10</sup> *Taittiriya Upanishad*: I-xi-3

easily develops arrogance in the person. It is quite possible that the giver starts looking upon the recipient with a despicable attitude. Such an attitude can destroy the giver!

While the Taittiriya Upanishad asks us to bring in Shraddha in our daily activities, the Katha Upanishad tells the story of an incredible aspect of Shraddha. The young boy Nachiketa is the hero of that story. His father Vajashravas undertakes a grand sacrifice – the Vishwajit Sacrifice. A thousand cows have to be donated in the course of that sacrifice. What kind of cows did Vajashravas donate? Old, barren cows; they had lost all their teeth; they did not have the energy even to drink water, says the Upanishad! Nachiketa watches all this. He feels greatly pained. A divine Shraddha awakens within him then. ‘Tam kumaram Shraddhaaviveshaa’ says the Upanishad.<sup>11</sup> Shraddha **entered** into the boy! Nachiketa thinks, ‘Ah! If my father gives away these cows, forget obtaining heaven, he will enter a world that doesn’t have the least bit of joy! I am his son; I must protect my father from this danger. Let him donate me; that will make up for this fault.’ Thinking like this, he asks his father to donate him too. The father, in a fit of anger, says, “Get lost! I shall give you away to Yama, the Lord of Death!” By the power of the same Shraddha, Nachiketa goes to the world of Death, accepts the Lord of Death as his Guru, and returns with boons of immortality and Self-knowledge.

While these are the incredible teachings of the Upanishads on Shraddha, we have Swami Vivekananda’s burning words on this Shraddha, which arouse every Indian who studies them!

Faith, faith! Burning faith – faith in oneself; faith in God! This is the only secret of greatness.<sup>12</sup>

I would not translate this word Shraddha to you, it would be a mistake; it is a wonderful word to understand, this Shraddha, and all great deeds depend on Shraddha. This Shraddha must enter into you. Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this Shraddha, because they believe in their muscles and if you believe in your spirit, how much more will it work! Therefore, this Shraddha is what I want, and what all of us here want, this faith in ourselves, and before you is the great task to get that faith. Give up the awful disease that is creeping into our national blood, that idea of ridiculing everything, that loss of seriousness. Give that up. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow.<sup>13</sup>

I remember that grand word of the Katha Upanishad — Shraddha or marvelous faith. An instance of Shraddha can be found in the life of Nachiketa. To preach the doctrine of Shraddha or genuine faith is the mission of my life.<sup>14</sup>

We are the children of the Almighty, we are sparks of the infinite, divine fire. How can we be nothings? We are everything, ready to do everything, we can do everything, and man must do everything. Therefore, my brethren, teach this life-saving, great, ennobling, grand doctrine to your children, even from their very birth.<sup>15</sup>

There (in the West) I saw that inside the national hearts of both Europe and America reside the tremendous power of the men's faith in themselves. An English boy will tell you, "I am an Englishman,

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<sup>11</sup> Katha: I:2

<sup>12</sup> Complete Works: Vol-3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: *The Mission Of The Vedanta*

<sup>13</sup> Complete Works: Vol-3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: *Address Of Welcome Presented At Calcutta And Reply*

<sup>14</sup> Complete Works: Vol-3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: *The Influence Of Indian Spiritual Thought In England*

<sup>15</sup> Complete Works: Vol-3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: *The Common Bases Of Hinduism*

and I can do anything." The American boy will tell you the same thing, and so will any European boy. Can our boys say the same thing here? No, nor even the boy's fathers. We have lost faith in ourselves. Ah! Who is there who will teach you all that the All-powerful Lord resides right within your own heart?<sup>16</sup>

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practiced, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished.<sup>17</sup>

You are all aware of Sita's story. Anyone who knows Sri Rama's story will be acquainted with Sita's story too. People are equally well aware of her immaculate purity of character. She was a princess herself; she chose to get married to a prince and dreamt of living a peaceful and happily married life with the man she herself chose; what peace and joy did she get? Life in exile! Alright; at least in the forest, while in exile, she wished to live peacefully and happily with her husband; was that possible? Every step, she had to face dangers; one after another crises came upon her in the forests; and one day she was abducted by Ravana. Then, there was the hellish experience she had to face while in Lanka! Alright; that also passed; Rama came in search of her; he killed her abductor Ravana; at least now she could dream of a peaceful life with Rama in her own kingdom; did that happen? Suddenly, she finds Rama has become stone-hearted! "You lived with a powerful man, Ravana, for years on end; how can I believe you now? I don't need you; you are free to go with anyone you wish; I killed Ravana to establish to glory of our clan, Raghuvamsha; not to get a woman who lived with another man." Rama said all this without batting an eyelid! These heartless words of her beloved husband were more painful and insulting than the treatment meted out to her by the wicked Ravana! She saw only way out – trial by fire! She ordered Lakshmana – set up a fire place. Lakshmana looked at Rama's face. With the same stoicism, Rama signaled Lakshmana to do as Sita had asked. A fire place was set up, with the flames burning ferociously. Sita circumambulated Rama. Then she circumambulated the roaring fire and prayed to that fire, "If my heart is pure, without the least blemish, may this fire protect me in every way. The Eternal Witnesses – Sun, Air, gods of the directions, moon, day, night, the two conjunctions (dawn & dusk), mother earth, and other gods and goddesses – can vouch for the purity of my character. If what I have claimed just now is true, may this fire protect me in every possible manner." Saying this, she circumambulated the fire place once more and jumped right into the blazing fire. Stunned by seeing this, the gods, vanaras, asuras, everyone started yelling and shrieking. Rama kept on looking at the floor, stoicism personified, but with tears in his eyes. All the gods approached Rama, extolled his glories, reminding him of his true character, and said that he hadn't done the right thing by rejecting Sita in this manner. At that same time, Agni, the god of fire, came to Rama, carrying Sita in his own arms and handing her over to Rama, said, "Rama, Sita is pure; neither by thought, nor by words, nor even by her eyes has she ever coveted another man; Ravana imprisoned her, tempted her in various ways, tortured her in innumerable ways; despite all these, Sita's mind did not budge one bit; Raghava, she believes only in you; her mind and all her life-forces are entirely on you; do not reject such a chaste wife; Rama, I order you; not even one word of insult shall come from you towards her; she is extremely chaste;<sup>18</sup> accept her." Saying this, Agni, the god of fire, handed over Sita to Rama. Coming out

<sup>16</sup> Complete Works: Vol-3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: *The Mission Of The Vedanta*

<sup>17</sup> Complete Works: Vol-2: Practical Vedanta and other lectures: *Practical Vedanta: Part-I*

<sup>18</sup> **Pativrata**: The ideal where the wife is irrevocably identified with her husband and with no other male member of society; so much so, that she doesn't even recognize any other male member as belonging to the male gender; all other male members of society are her sons or brothers only. The only male member in the whole world is her husband. Ancient India had developed this ideal with the name of 'Pativrata' for women. The analogous ideal for men was 'Ekatnivrata'. Sita and Rama were embodiments of these ideals.



of the fire, Sita was exactly the same as she was before jumping into the fire. Her pitch black hair, the frills of hair on her forehead, the flowers she had worn on her head, her red-bordered saree, everything was untouched by the fire! The same fire, in whose witness Rama had held Sita's hand in holy matrimony, the same fire now returned back Sita, untouched, unscathed, to Rama. All the gods established the immaculate purity of Sita's character. Rama was extremely pleased seeing all this development. Rama addressed Agni and said, "O god of fire, you know Sita very well. I know that she is pure. But, social considerations made me act so heartlessly. If I had readily accepted a woman who had lived in another man's house, people would have a chance to denigrate me saying, 'O look what a fool, what a lustful man Dasaratha's son Rama is!' Therefore, keeping social considerations in mind, I did not stop Sita from undergoing her trial by fire. Sita is pure. Her mind is entirely established on me alone. She has been protected by her own purity. I shall never be able to leave such a woman." Rama explained this to all the gods who had assembled there, precipitated by the extreme step taken by Sita. This is the story of the terrible Agnipariksha or Trial by Fire of Sita. She however came out with flying colors. Such indeed was the chaste woman who was Rama's wife.

You may also be aware of Damayanti's story. She was the wife of King Nala. She had heard of Nala's handsome features and his achievements and had decided to accept only him as her husband. But the Swayamvara<sup>19</sup> that was conducted for her turned out to be a major test of her character. The gods Indra, Agni, Varuna, and Yama also had come to attend the Swayamvara. And they all had assumed the form of Nala in the Swayamvara. Damayanti prayed to them with great humility and helplessness, "O gods, I offer my salutations to you. I have decided to marry none else but Nala. I need your blessings for that." Responding to the purity behind her prayer, the gods resumed their original forms, and paved the way for her to wed Nala. But just as she began enjoying a happy married life with Nala, one more terrible problem stood before her. Nala lost a game of dice with his brother Pushkara; and he had wagered his entire kingdom in the game. Having lost his kingdom, Nala had to retire to the forest. His devoted wife had followed him into the forest. But Nala deserted her in the forest and absconded! Can we even imagine the misfortune of this royal lady? Somehow or the other, with great difficulty, she reached her father's house. How long indeed can a married woman live in her father's house? But Damayanti's thinking was very clear even under these extremely trying circumstances. She planned another Swayamvara. Nala came running when he heard that Damayanti was performing another Swayamvara. Thus she got him back and then onwards their life was uneventful. These incredible, yet pathetic events in the life of Damayanti make us think about what it means to be an ideal wife. Such was the famous jewel among women who was Nala's wife Damayanti!

The adventurous story of Sati Savitri is too well known. Even though she knew that Satyavan would die young, Savitri chose to marry him alone. She lived a very pure life with him for as long as he was alive. Then he had an untimely death. She followed him right up to Yama's place; she had an intense argument with Yama and successfully brought back her husband from the land of death. People travel all over the land and under the water and in the skies and call it adventure. What could be more adventurous

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<sup>19</sup> In ancient India, princesses had social sanction to choose their husbands. The process of doing so was called 'Swayamvara', which literally means 'Choosing one's husband'. The princess's father, the King of that land, would announce his daughter's Swayamvara. A big get-together would be arranged. Eligible princes from far and near would be invited to that get-together. The princess would be lined up. The princess would move from one prince to another. As she stands in front of a prince, his escorts would delineate his qualities and achievements. If she liked that prince, she would place a garland on his neck, thereby indicating that she had chosen him. Else, she would move ahead to the next prince.

than going to the Land of Death, arguing with the Lord of Death, and bringing back a dead husband to life again!

The reason we went into a detailed explanation of the stories of these three extraordinary women is: Swami Vivekananda upholds these three women as the ideals of womanhood! Suffering all one's life with great patience, entering a blazing fire, and coming out of it unscathed, and at last getting re-united with her husband is no ordinary achievement. We saw Sita do these things. I ask, what was the secret behind Sita's achievement? What power enabled her to do this? You may answer, 'her chastity'. But I say, it was her supreme Shraddha. It is the same supreme Shraddha that is the secret of the power by which Damayanti brought back her luckless husband who, under the evil influence of Kali, lost everything – his kingdom, prestige, chaste wife, and even his ability to think & decide rightly. Again, it is the same supreme Shraddha that is the secret of the power by which Savitri snatched away her husband from the jaws of death.

This Shraddha is a divine attitude, a state of mind, so to speak. It is not possible to point it out like we point out things in this world. But we can recognize it when it is manifested in human personality. We can clearly see it in the three incredible wives just now referred to above. This Shraddha has to be as integral in a person's character as a wife is to her husband. Mahanarayana Upanishad<sup>20</sup> clarifies this idea in a wonderful way:

Tasyaivam vidusho yajnyasyatma yajamanah shraddhaa patnee shariramidmam uro vedirlomani; A monk performs the Yajna<sup>21</sup> within his own mind; who is the Yajamana<sup>22</sup> in that Yajna? Yajnyasyatma yajamanah; his own self is the Yajamana; along with the yajamana, his wife too should sit through the Yajna, as an initiate in the Yajna; who is this monk's wife? Shraddhaa patnee; Shraddha is his wife! The firewood that is burnt in the fire place of the Yajna is his own body; and so on goes the detailed metaphorical Yajna of the monk. Now, what is really interesting to us is this – in the Yajna that a monk performs within his mind, his **wife** is Shraddha. It is common knowledge that for the successful performance of a Yajna, wife's presence is paramount. In fact, if a person is without a wife, he is debarred from performing Yajna. During the course of the Yajna, if the wife dies, or for some reason becomes absent, the Yajna comes to a halt then and there. Similarly, in the monk's life, if his Shraddha goes away, or if it diminishes in its potency, his entire life becomes meaningless. A monk places supreme faith in his Guru's advice. He places the highest faith in the truth enunciated in the Scriptures. He doesn't move an inch from this position all his life. In this way, since his Shraddha is a part and parcel of his own identity, of his entire existence, the Upanishad calls his Shraddha as his wife.

Just see the innumerable efforts done by our ancestors to explain, and delineate, the attitude of Shraddha. This effort at elaborating Shraddha has taken so many forms, so many varieties of methods – philosophical discussions, psychological studies, stories, metaphors, etc. Vedanta specifies that in order to obtain Self-Knowledge, we need six treasures. The payment for Self-Knowledge is to be in the form of

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<sup>20</sup> *Mahanarayana Upanishad: Ch-35*

<sup>21</sup> **Yajna**: is the mandatory fire-sacrifice that every person has to perform, as prescribed by the Brahmana, Mantra & Aranyaka portions of the Vedas. Now, this Yajna will be performed for fulfilling some desire only. Whatever be the desire one has, there is a Yajna he can perform to obtain it. In this case, the Yajna is being performed by a Monk. What can be the desire he entertains? It is realization of Brahman. With the aim of realizing Brahman, a Monk is ordained to perform this Yajna, within his own mind.

<sup>22</sup> Every Yajna has a proprietor, an owner, who initiates it. He is called the **Yajamana**. It is to obtain his desired object that the Yajna will be performed. In this case, the ever-awake witness within the Monk, his Atman, is the Yajamana.

these six treasures; nothing else will do. You have to **pay** these six treasures, in exchange for obtaining Self-Knowledge. If you want to purchase something, you will need to pay its full price. If the thing is valuable, you need great amounts of wealth to own it. Self-Knowledge is the most valuable possession one can have, being born as a human being. So, the price to be paid for this most valuable possession also has to be commensurate. What are these six treasures?

Shama, Dama, Uparati, Titiksha, Samadhana, and Shraddha; these are the six treasures.<sup>23</sup> Thus, according to Vedanta, Shraddha is one such treasure. Shraddha is the currency to be paid in order to obtain the invaluable Self-Knowledge. Again, what is this Shraddha? Vedanta is very precise; they attempt to explain what this amazing treasure is; they say, Guruvakyeshu vishwasah Shraddha; the faith you place in your Guru's words, in his advice, is Shraddha. What are the Guru's words? What does the Guru say?

1. **God is.**
2. **If you call on Him, He answers.**
3. **You need to call.**

We are asked to place our faith in these words. If you can't place faith in the 1<sup>st</sup> statement that God exists, then the remaining two statements become useless. Guru gives a mantra to the disciple and asks him to keep on chanting that mantra, to keep on doing Japa of that mantra. What does the disciple do now? He should sit quietly and do Japa of the mantra given by his Guru. This is the way in which he places Shraddha in his Guru's words. But the disciple sits for Japa for a little while; then his mind gets 'bored'; he gets up and roams around. His mind tells him, 'Huff! What is this! Repeat the same mantra again & again, again & again! What indeed can I get from doing this stupid thing!' he then comes to the Guru and asks, 'What is Shraddha? Does it mean keep on repeating the same mantra endlessly?' Indeed, it is almost impossible to convey the meaning of this word Shraddha by words. Swamiji therefore said once, "We don't have any synonym in our Bengali language to express the Sanskrit word Shraddha. The Katha Upanishad says that Shraddha entered into the heart of Nachiketa. Even with the word Ekagrata (one-pointedness) we cannot express the whole significance of the word Shraddha. The word Ekagranishtha (one-pointed devotion) conveys, to a certain extent, the meaning of the word Shraddha."<sup>24</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, this Shraddha doesn't have a specific form in which it manifests. But it becomes visible in personalities. Even though you may have no idea of what Shraddha is, if you meet a person in whom Shraddha has manifested, you will immediately get influenced by it, you will get inspired by it. The Shraddha that emanates out of him will resonate with the inherent Shraddha inside you, even though it be momentarily. The way you respond to the waves of Shraddha that beat against you from him makes your own Shraddha dynamic. In this manner, the waves of his Shraddha awaken your own Shraddha. The Shraddha that emanates from him automatically creates an atmosphere filled with Shraddha all around you.

Students come to College for education. The teachers come to College to impart that education to these students. When students see the teacher entering the classroom, they should get up, showing respect to the teachers. But, of late, we don't find students showing any deference, any respect to their teachers. Is

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<sup>23</sup> Please see *Atmabodha*: Introduction, by Swami Nikhilananda: pp: 44-46

<sup>24</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-5: *Conversations with Swami Vivekananda*: by Sharat Ch Chakraborty: Ch-12

this because students don't have Shraddha in them? It may be true to a certain extent. But, the major reason is the absence of self-confidence in the teachers. Why do teachers today lack self-confidence? Today's teachers, well, not all of them, but most of them, I dare say, lack the confidence that they will teach their subject well to their students, and are capable of clearing all the doubts in that subject that may arise in the students' minds. They lack that very knowledge, their domain knowledge, the content of education, which they need to impart to their students. Why do they lack their domain knowledge? When they were students, they didn't study their subjects with Shraddha. So, this is a vicious circle they are in today; because they lacked Shraddha in their own studies, they lack domain knowledge and skills today, and since they lack domain knowledge and skills today, they don't have the self-confidence that is vital for a teacher. No one has any respect for a person who lacks self-respect, self-confidence. Therefore it is only those filled with Shraddha that can throw their influence on other persons.

Sri Ramakrishna was a priest in Rani Rasmani's Kali Temple. Today, he is worshipped as the greatest of Avatars. But once, in the past, he was just an ordinary temple priest. Not just that, he was a priest with no knowledge of Sanskrit. There was a Radha-Govinda Temple adjacent to the Kali Temple, within the same Temple compound. One day, due to the absent-mindedness of the priest of that temple, the Radha-Govinda idol fell down and its leg was broken.<sup>25</sup> A broken idol can't be worshipped. All the scriptures are unanimous on this matter. All the scholars of the region decided that the broken idol must be discarded and a new idol must be installed in its place. They conveyed their learned decision to Rani Rasmani. But, the Rani somehow, couldn't digest this decision; but at the same time, she was in no position to reject the unanimous and learned decision of all the learned scholars, too. She approached Sri Ramakrishna for his opinion on this matter. We must remember one point here; when all this happened, Sri Ramakrishna was just a stripling of a boy; in front of those learned scholars, he was a boy, called Gadadhar, of no consequence or social standing, and had absolutely no weight in the academic circles. And yet, the Rani asked his opinion. And what does the boy say? "What! If the Rani's son-in-law were to break a bone in his leg, would the Rani send him away and get her daughter a new son-in-law?" Everyone was stunned, hearing these words of Gadadhar! This kind of solution to a broken idol is not to be found in any scripture. Hence the learned scholars could not accept this solution. But, there was so much force in the boy's words, that all those learned scholars had to accept this solution, without any objection. Sri Ramakrishna himself repaired that broken idol in such a way that no one was able to find out that it had a crack. He was not just a thinker; he was able to practicalize what he thought and spoke too. We need not go into this terribly important point here, but we ought to highlight it in passing. But, how did that boy silence all those learned, scholarly giants? It was his burning Shraddha. For him, that idol was not just mud and mortar; it was the living Govinda himself for him! His solution to the Rani's dilemma sprang from this incredible Shraddha. It was the same incredible Shraddha that silenced the scholars too. When this kind of Shraddha awakens in our mind, in our words, and in our actions, we too will see Sri Ramakrishna's power entering into us.

Sri Sharada Devi was then still a young girl of 18 or 19 years. Once she was travelling on foot from Jayrambati to Dakshineswar. Having fallen behind from her group of fellow travelers, she ran into some dacoits during this tour. Many of you are aware of this incident. Seeing a lonely young lady coming his way, the dacoit grunted at her, "Who is it?" Sri Sharada Devi approaches him with all innocence of heart and says, "Father, it is me, your daughter Sharada." The dacoit stands frozen for a moment! By the

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<sup>25</sup> *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*: Part-III: Ch-VI: Sec-22; Pg-439

time he was able to process those words ‘my daughter’, his wife approached the scene. Sharada Devi ran towards her, embraced her, and opened out her heart, saying, “Mother, I am your daughter Sharada. Your son-in-law lives there in Dakshineswar. I am going to join him there. My companions all proceeded farther, leaving me behind.” These words melted the dacoit couple. They felt that Sharada was really their daughter. They felt this so viscerally that they decided it was their duty, as parents, to escort her to her husband in Dakshineswar. And the next day, they did it; they went all the way to Dakshineswar and handed her over safely to Sri Ramakrishna. There, at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna too realized the situation, and responded to this dacoit couple as though he were really their son-in-law.<sup>26</sup>

Here, in this amazing incident, we see most clearly the exquisite beauty of Shraddha. If, someone else had fallen into the hands of that dacoit and had addressed him as ‘Father’, or his wife as ‘mother’, would he have melted, would he have shown mercy? Most certainly not! He would have replied, “Hush! You fool! Don’t try to be smart with me. You think you can address me as ‘Father’ and then can escape? I won’t let you go!” But when Sharada Devi addressed the dacoit couple as ‘Father’ and ‘Mother’, they melted because such was the sincerity, innocence in the entire personality of Sharada Devi. All the sincerity, innocence, and authenticity in the young Sharada manifested through her words and this entire something within her is to be understood as Shraddha. When Sharada Devi spoke, genuine, authentic feelings of the child-parent relationship played within her personality. Hence, by resonance, as it were, there was an awakening of genuine filial affection within the hearts of the dacoit couple.

Let us recall the first few words uttered by Swami Vivekananda in the very 1<sup>st</sup> public address made by him in the Chicago Parliament of Religions. What were those words? He addressed the assembly with the words ‘Sisters and brothers of America’. The moment he uttered those words, the clapping started! Continuous clapping for two full minutes; the entire audience, with great joy, enthusiasm and with an uncommon fervor went on clapping relentlessly for two minutes! Have you wondered what it is like for thousands of people to keep on clapping for such a long time, with great passion? I kept a watch and experimented like this once. But I was a lone person clapping! It did not have the force of thousands of hands clapping! It did not have the passion of thousands of hands clapping! Yet, I persisted, with the result that I realized how long a time, indeed, two minutes is! You may also try this when you go home. But inform them beforehand why you are doing this; or better still; involve them too with you in clapping for two minutes. I am saying this for only one reason; you must realize what it actually means to have thousands of hands clapping relentless for such a long time! Only when you do that, you will understand the response the assembly gave to Swamiji’s words of addressing them as ‘Sisters and brothers’. Why should just two words bring out so much fervor from the audience? What could be the reason? Here in our country, every day, in hundreds of assemblies, the speakers keep uttering words such as ‘sisters and brothers’, or ‘ladies and gentlemen’. We don’t see such an energetic response or such extended, uncommon clapping anywhere. Perhaps, the audience has got used to it; could that be the reason? No, not so. There is an ocean of difference between Swamiji uttering the words ‘sisters and brothers’, and any normal person, using the same words to address the audience. An ordinary person says ‘sisters and brothers’ – does he really have that brotherly feeling in his heart? Has he sincerely practiced this brotherly feeling in his daily life? Has he really sublimated his feelings? Is there purity in his heart? No, not to an extent that others can feel the purity inside him. And people have a way of somehow detecting this absence of true purity within the speaker’s heart. The listeners somehow detect that his words are merely

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<sup>26</sup> *Sri Sarada Devi & her divine play*: Swami Chetanananda: Ch-5: pp: 77-81

words, without any feeling behind them. That is the reason, even though they are addressed as sister and brothers, they feel nothing; no feeling is roused within them. But, when Swamiji went to a foreign land and addressed unknown persons as sisters and brothers, something hit them, something affected them; why? He spoke not just words; through those words, he sent out genuine love and affection from deep within his heart. The love that was burning in his heart, poured as the words ‘sisters and brothers’, went forth and touched the hearts of his listeners and resonated there. Within every man in that gigantic Albert Hall arose the feeling, ‘Indeed! I am his brother, and he is my brother.’ Within every woman in that gigantic Albert Hall arose the feeling, ‘Indeed! I am his sister, and he is my brother.’ Faith in this feeling awakened within their hearts. From end to end within that Hall, pure feelings of brotherhood filled the atmosphere. The audience responded with unprecedented fervor to this onslaught of purity that emanated from Swami Vivekananda, and that response came out in the form of spontaneous, relentless clapping!<sup>27</sup> If the heart is filled with Shraddha, even one or two words spoken will carry tremendous power; those few words become mantras, as it were! If the heart is filled with Shraddha, even one or two good actions done will carry tremendous power; those actions become miracles, as it were! Even today, over 125 years later, Swamiji’s words act like thunderbolts on the person who read them, why? His entire Shraddha is encapsulated within his words. Even today, over 125 years later, the activities initiated by Swamiji are giving life to innumerable people in India and abroad, why? His entire Shraddha is encapsulated within his actions.

He says,<sup>28</sup> “What we need today is Shraddha; faith in ourselves. Strength is life; weakness is death. I am the Spirit. Where is death for me? We are free. We are pure. By our very nature, we are the pure Atman. Can we sin? Never! This kind of Shraddha is needed by us urgently. Faith like this can make us lions; can make us gods on Earth. It is because we lost this Shraddha that our country has gone to ruins today.”

His disciple, to whom he said this, asks again, “How did we lose this Shraddha?”

Swamiji replies, “Right from our childhood, all our life, what we get is a negative education. What we have learned from this kind of education is that we are nobodies, we are inconsequential. We were never taught that great persons lived in our country. Our ancestors were great men. We never received life-giving education. Why, we didn’t even get the education by which we could learn to use our own hands and feet and make a living for ourselves. We have spent our lives learning about the ancestors of our foreign rulers. But we are ignorant of the greatness of our own forefathers. We have only learned that we are weak. Centuries of slavery has convinced us that we are indeed weak and helpless. We have been trained to believe that we shall have to remain slaves forever! What can be the consequence of this kind of education other than loss of Shraddha in us? Therefore I say that we have to regain that lost Shraddha. We must once again awaken that faith in our Atman. Only then, one by one, all the problems that our nation faces today can be solved. For instance, look at me. I too was born in this land. I grew up in the midst of all this slavery.

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<sup>27</sup> For another detailed explanation from Swamiji’s own mouth, please see: *Swami Vivekananda in the West – New discoveries*: Vol-6: Sister Gargi: Advaita Ashrama: Pg: 155: Ida Ansell, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda notes in her diary: “One day, he (Swami Vivekananda) said this startling thing to us: ‘In my first speech in this country, in Chicago, I addressed that audience as “Sisters and Brothers of America,” and you know that they all rose to their feet. You may wonder what made them do this, you may wonder if I had some strange power. Let me tell you that **I did have a power** and this is it - never once in my life did I allow myself to have even one sexual thought. I trained my mind, my thinking, and the powers that man usually uses along that line I put into a higher channel, and it developed a force so strong that nothing could resist it.”

<sup>28</sup> What follows is a free translation of *Conversations with Swami Vivekananda*: Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-5: recorded by Surendra Nath Sen, Chapter-II; on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 1898

But I never considered myself a slave. As a result, those westerners – those very westerners who consider Indians to be worthless – showered so much of respect on me, respect bordering on worship. Even now, they do so. You too, if you can strongly believe that you have infinite potentiality within you, that infinite knowledge is within you, that infinite power is within you, and if you can manifest them, you too will become just like me.”

The disciple then asked, “Who indeed can become like you!”

Swamiji says with a firm voice, “What! After I am gone, do you think there will be no Vivekananda? By the grace of God, each one of you has the potentiality to be a Vivekananda. Surrender to God sincerely. When you become a true instrument in His hands, He will drive away all the Tamas within you and raise you to the heights of Sattva, and then He will get great works done through you too. You will yourself witness this transformation.”

It would be wrong to think that these words of Swamiji were just for encouraging us, or for consoling us. He said these words to make us men filled with Shraddha, in the truest sense of the term. Our Scriptures give us sufficient advice. The Avatars have given us sufficient guidance. Even today, here and there, we get the same guidance through wise and inspired men. We must approach them with Shraddha; we must grasp the secret of Shraddha; we must be capable of living a life impelled by this Shraddha. This is my prayer for all of us. With these words, I bring my lecture to an end.

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### **Swami Vivekananda on Shraddha**

All such ideas as that we can do this or cannot do that are superstitions. We can do everything. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world say that a man who does not believe in a Personal God outside of himself is an atheist, so the Vedanta says, a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what the Vedanta calls atheism.<sup>29</sup>

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practiced, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great.<sup>30</sup>

Let a man go down as low as possible; there must come a time when out of sheer desperation he will take an upward curve and will learn to have faith in himself. But it is better for us that we should know it from the very first. Why should we have all these bitter experiences in order to gain faith in ourselves? We can see that all the difference between man and man is owing to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so; and as I grow older, that faith is becoming stronger and stronger. He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God.

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<sup>29</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-II:Pg-294*

<sup>30</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-II:Pg-301*

The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourselves means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better. I am sure of that. He is the highest man who can say with truth, "I know all about myself." Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness. 'This Âtman is first to be heard of.' Hear day and night that you are that Soul.<sup>31</sup>

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God — this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.<sup>32</sup>

We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls. It is, therefore, that I preach this Advaita; and I do so not as a sectarian, but upon universal and widely acceptable grounds.<sup>33</sup>

Whether dualistic, qualified monistic, or monistic, they all firmly believe that everything is in the soul itself; it has only to come out and manifest itself. Therefore, this Shraddha is what I want, and what all of us here want, this faith in ourselves, and before you is the great task to get that faith. Give up the awful disease that is creeping into our national blood, that idea of ridiculing everything, that loss of seriousness. Give that up. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow.<sup>34</sup>

Be not afraid of anything. You will do marvelous work. The moment you fear, you are nobody. It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions. It is fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.'<sup>35</sup>

If a man, day and night, thinks he is miserable, low, and nothing, nothing he becomes. If you say yea, yea, 'I am, I am', so shall you be; and if you say 'I am not', think that you are not, and day and night meditate upon the fact that you are nothing, ay, nothing shall you be. That is the great fact which you ought to remember. We are the children of the Almighty, we are sparks of the infinite, divine fire. How can we be nothings? We are everything, ready to do everything, we can do everything, and man must do everything. This faith in themselves was in the hearts of our ancestors, this faith in themselves was the motive power that pushed them forward and forward in the march of civilization; and if there has been degeneration, if there has been defect, mark my words, you will find that degradation to have started on

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<sup>31</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-II:Pg-301*

<sup>32</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-III:Pg-190*

<sup>33</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-III:Pg-191*

<sup>34</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-III:Pg-320*

<sup>35</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-III:Pg-321*



the day our people lost this faith in themselves. Losing faith in one's self means losing faith in God. Do you believe in that infinite, good Providence working in and through you? If you believe that this Omnipresent One, the *Antaryamin*, is present in every atom, is through and through, *Ota-prota*, as the Sanskrit word goes, penetrating your body, mind and soul, how can you lose, heart? I may be a little bubble of water, and you may be a mountain-high wave. Never mind! The infinite ocean is the background of me as well as of you. Mine also is that infinite ocean of life, of power, of spirituality, as well as yours. I am already joined – from my very birth, from the very fact of my life – I am in Yoga with that infinite life and infinite goodness and infinite power, as you are, mountain-high though you may be. Therefore, my brethren, teach this life-saving, great, ennobling, grand doctrine to your children, even from their very birth.<sup>36</sup>

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*Translated from a Kannada lecture transcript;  
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<sup>36</sup> *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda: Vol-III:Pg-376*