

Walking towards God with Love: Learning from Swami Vivekananda

Swarnima Sharma

Assistant Professor

University Institute of Liberal Arts

Chandigarh University

swarnima.uila@cumail.in

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Abstract: God is not in discussions. He is not in intellectual pursuits, in thoughts, feelings, deliberations, negotiations. As much as He is a part of this world He is other-worldly. So He is not bound by the rules of this world. He is other-worldly, so He cannot be constructed out of the material taken from this world. He is the creator, so the most creative of thoughts, the best out-of-the-box thinking, the sharpest of arguments, the deepest of understandings, the best of knowledge, the wildest of leaps and the highest of jumps cannot reach Him. The strongest of inventions and the rarest of discoveries touches but a minuscule part of Him, if at all. The best of man's creations, the most beautiful of what man can build lose significance in front of His grandiose. It is not possible to know Him through the material of the world. He comes from beyond, beyond senses, beyond creation. He can be known by going beyond and we can go beyond if He so wills through His Grace. The real purpose of man's life has been put forward by saints and mystics through the ages and they state that it is God realization. Realizing Him is nothing but walking the path of true love. In the present paper an attempt is made to understand the nature of this world and how the dominant belief- systems of today are insufficient to reach God. It also discusses walking the path of love to God realization. This paper anchors itself on the pronouncements of Swami Vivekananda and tries to learn from his discourses beautifully brought together in The Complete Works by Advaita Ashrama.

Introduction

We all question life- Who am I? Why was I born? What am I supposed to do with my life? Where will it lead me? Why is there sorrow? Why does life have to end? What is the solution? No human being can claim that he has never sought answers to these questions. Sometime or the

other in the course of human life these questions do come and stand before each one of us. And when they do that they make us think, look for answers. The real answer to these questions is the answer to the mystery of life so the answer too is not that easy to be found. It is a journey of many lifetimes. But during one lifetime depending on the progress that an individual soul has made in its previous births, the soul stops at an answer that it finds most appropriate according to its maturity and makes it its way of life. The answer goes on changing as the life progresses, taking the soul up or down the life current. Even though the answers differ from person to person and are as varied as the number of humans on this planet, but they still follow certain common patterns, certain belief systems. All these belief systems are right in their own way but the real question is how far they lead us. Let us look at some dominant belief-systems of the way to live life and find how and why they do not answer the question of life from the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

Senses are the way of life

Life is what we see. It is that which is visible. It is what we experience through our senses. If we take this view-point to be the right way to look at life and contemplate on it the steps that the thought process would follow could be something like this- Let us start from the senses. Look out, look around. What do you see and feel? The rivers and the mountains, the water and the surrounding air, the birds and butterflies and the innumerable insects and the mammals and the amphibians, the whales, the sharks, the waves, the breeze, the storm, fire, sky....Look more and you will see the top of the creation- Man and his creations-the cities and the towns, the high-rise and the huts, the roads and the highways, the schools, the hospitals, the festivities, the celebrations, fun and frolic, happiness and sadness, light and dark, hot and cold, easy and difficult, smiles and tears, struggles and joys. We see and we feel, hear, touch, taste, have opinions on each one of them, criticize or condemn or praise or honour. But looking at them, experiencing them does not lead us to the answer of the basic question- Who am I? The human mind then decides to look beyond. It tries...concentrates...thinks...ponders...introspects...the reality of the physical world starts blurring; but howsoever hard he might contemplate the answers are not forthcoming. It is then that man realizes that answers are not in what we see, hear, touch, taste- they are beyond. As it is “the sense world is, only one portion, one bit of that infinite spiritual universe projected into the plane of sense consciousness (CWIII, 1948).” It is

for this reason that all our efforts at self-development and self-growth fail so miserably if we concentrate on knowing this world through the channel of senses. What we search for in life 'belongs to the super sensuous and not to the sense plane (CWIII, 1948).' Our senses connect us to this world, whereas the Truth is beyond. It is a place where reasoning can play no role; intellect fails, where all the accumulated learning from the books does not help.

Only Religion is the way of life

Religion has become for man a vain speculation (CW III, 1948).

Why do we need religion? This question confronts the seeker. Does religion solve the mystery of life? Does it take away pain? Does it take away hardships and struggle? Swami Vivekananda says- "Supposing it cannot, would that prove the untruth of religion?" He gives an example of a baby who stands up during a demonstration of an astronomical theorem and asks "Does it bring gingerbread?" The question is very relevant to him and the only one he is concerned about. Child psychology has proved beyond doubt that babies look at the world from their stand-point only. All the babies of the world think like that. But their view-point of looking at the astronomical problem howsoever right it may appear to them is not how it should be looked at. An astronomical problem cannot be bound by the theory of gingerbread. Higher things cannot be judged from a low standpoint. 'Everything must be judged by its own standard, the infinite must be judged by the standard of the infinity'. But the question that now arises is whether religion is understood correctly. Mata Amritanandamayi, once expressed it: "Religion and its essential principles have not been understood. In fact, they have even been misinterpreted. There are two aspects for every religion in the world: the inner and the outer. The outer is the philosophy or the intellectual part and the inner is the spiritual part. Those who become too attached to the outside of religion will be misled. Religions are pointers." (From Amma's Heart, 2003, p. 104) There must come a point in the journey of a seeker when the outer must be discarded in favor of the inner. The former must be transcended. Similarly, Sri Sathya Sai Baba said: "It is good to be born in a church but it is not good to die in it (Murphet, 1994).

Living in the present- Living life by knowing the known is the way of life

Swami Vivekananda in his address- Unity, the goal of Religion, delivered in New York, in 1896 threw a question to the audience. He said that many a times when people do understand that there

is life beyond they simply ask- ‘Why shall we not be content with the known? Why shall we not rest satisfied with eating, driving and doing a little good to the society? They say that we are aware that the known and the knowable are bounded on both sides by the unknown and the infinitely unknown, why struggle for that infinite unknown?’”

The present life is full of challenges. One challenge after another confronts man. Following the philosophy of simple existence, living in the present, taking one day at a time makes life somewhat easy, gives an impression of a balance, some semblance of living life with a purpose and makes the conscience comfortable. It also takes away the struggle of asking questions about beyond and the venturing out into the unknown looking for answers. And life flies and at the end of life you know you carry with you a bag full of good deeds. Work done, target achieved. Vivekananda says that the view where helping others is viewed as the penultimate purpose of human existence has become a truism in the present time. But does living a good life alone the answer to life’s questions? It does make life worth living, adds some purpose to life and doing good gives happiness but the basic questions of life remain unanswered. Swami Vivekananda provides the solution when he says-‘We must inquire into the beyond. This present, this expressed is only one part of that unexpressed...it is when we meet Him that our entire search ends(CW, III, p.13)’”

Love- The Way to God

The deepest of human needs is to find a place for self in the world, a place where he is appreciated, accepted, respected, where he belongs, where he has someone to call his own and where he finds that ultimate haven, that non-stateable but often felt feeling of extreme bliss, of being owned by someone, finally, completely, irrevocable. Man calls it a basic need. He calls it love. Numerous poets, thinkers and philosophers have written numerous songs on love. Love is what makes the world go around; love ticks us, sustains us, supports us and helps us to grow. Love is what a human needs. Love is God!

Swami Vivekananda puts it beautifully when he says –‘We see love everywhere in nature. Whatever in society is good and great and sublime, is the working out of that love...it is this same emotion that gives us the pure and holy conjugal love between husband and wife, as well as the sort of love which goes on to satisfy the lowest forms of animal passion. The emotion is the

same, but its manifestation is different in different cases.’ Man throughout life goes on looking for the realization of that pure, true love through the various relationships he forms. Each relationship satisfies him in parts, gives him a little of that something that he so desires. But perfection is not reached. In spite of that the intense longing for association, the strong desire on the part of two to become one is manifested in all life forms. That perfection or a semblance of that perfection is felt in fleeting life experiences but the stability, the changelessness of love that the human soul craves for is not attained. The thirst is not quenched and the whole life is spent in searching for it or in adjusting or accepting a very badly chosen and unsatisfying substitute. Our rational mind then tells us that the perfection that we pine for is but a utopian idea, an ideally perfect place, state, society, and a visionary system that does not actually exist. We thus give up the fight and adjust to a lower level of existence.

Swami Vivekananda says that we should not lose heart as ‘Every soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection (CVIII, Bhakti-yoga, p.31). The child is born with hope. ‘The whole world is a golden vision to the opening eyes of the child (CV,II, p.70)’ He believes in his perfection. But as he grows he is hurled time and again against the adamant wall of imperfect world till he loses the dream that he was born with, becomes a part of this flawed existence and starts associating himself with it. He thus loses that spark that was his, becomes a part of this imperfect way of life and continues living a less than perfect life. Perfection is thus lost as a dream. Swami Vivekananda again reminds us of the purpose of life- “We come into this world to fight, as on a battle-field” (CV, II, p.118). A baby cries when he is born, he comes to learn and to make a path for himself through this infinite ocean of life and he goes on till death comes and takes him off the field of life.

Knowing Life through the Triangle of Love

Swami Vivekananda states the three characteristics of the Triangle of Love. The first angle is that love knows no bargaining. “Where ever there is any seeking for something in return, there can be no real love; it becomes a mere matter of shop-keeping. The Bhakta loves the Lord because He is lovable: there is no other motive”. The second angle of the triangle of love is that there is no fear in love. “Those that love God through fear are the lowest of human beings, quite undeveloped as men. They worship God from fear of punishment”. Even the love of a human being makes one feel secure, then how can the love of God put fear in the heart. Love naturally

conquers all fears. A mother protects her child at the cost of her life for her love for him. And God protects and loves whether humans acknowledge that love or not. His love is like that unshakable pillar that no storm can move. The third angle of the love triangle is that “love knows no rival, for in it is always embodied the lover’s highest ideal. True love never comes until the object of our love becomes to us our highest ideal”. The highest ideal of every human being whether of beauty, of sublimity, and of power, is God (CW III, p.86)”. These ideals exist in every mind naturally in the form impressions and all the active manifestations of human nature are struggles of those ideals to become realized in real life. The lover of God who has acquired conviction for these three ideals and practices them unquestioningly and effortlessly is performing the highest form of Bhakti. All other forms of Bhakti are the stages to reach the ideal of love and once that “ highest of ideals is reached, philosophy is thrown away...Freedom, Salvation, Nirvana- all are thrown away...the Bhakta cares only for Love and thus he finally gets merged in the object of his worship.”(CW II, p.72). Thus ends the journey and the final culmination in achieved in Bliss. The struggle comes to an end; the soul can at last rest in the sweet embrace of God. The darkness is removed, there is just light. The fear becomes an unknown word and the soul flies to be with the one he was supposed to be in the first place. It is then that the soul sings out aloud

*Behold, it comes in might,
The power that is not power,
The light that is in darkness,
The shade in dazzling light.*

*It is joy that never spoke,
And grief unfelt, profound,
Immortal life unlived,
Eternal death unmourned.*

*It is not joy nor sorrow,
But that which is between,
It is not night nor morrow,
But that which joins them in.*

*It is sweet rest in music;
And pause in sacred art;
The silence between speaking;
Between two fits of passion -
It is the calm of heart.*

It is beauty never seen,

*And love that stands alone,
It is song that lives un-sung,
And knowledge never known.*

*It is death between two lives,
And lull between two storms,
The void whence rose creation,
And that where it returns.*

*To it the tear-drop goes,
To spread the smiling form
It is the Goal of Life,
And Peace - its only home!*

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