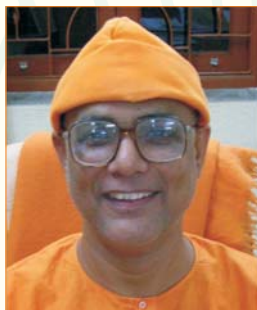




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Vichar Manch

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The Science of Life and Living *Swami Vivekananda's Worldview*

Swami Atmapriyananda

Thursday, 28 February 2013
Time: 4:00 pm

Venue:

National Agricultural Science Centre Complex
Dev Prakash Shastri Marg
New Delhi 110 012

All are cordially invited

Swami Atmapriyananda



Swami Atmapriyananda is the Vice Chancellor of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, a multi-campus University trying to actualize Swami Vivekananda's educational vision and devoted to teaching and research in a variety of unique Faculties. On account of its unique features, particularly its emphasis on 'gap areas' (areas scarcely addressed by the conventional Universities in India), this new University has been awarded full membership of 'Global University Network for Innovation' (GUNI), a Europe-based global organization networking Universities with social commitment. Swami Atmapriyananda received his Ph.D. from the University of Madras, India, in Theoretical Physics for his work in particle theory and has a number of research publications in reputed international journals. Inspired by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, he joined the Ramakrishna Order of monks in 1978 and was posted at Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, a premier college of Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math, where he taught Physics for nearly 25 years besides serving as Vice-Principal and Principal for 19 years before taking charge as Vice Chancellor of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University in July 2005.

As a monk and an educationist, his present interests are: (i) Swami Vivekananda's educational vision—education for character building in the youth, (ii) Yoga-Vedanta vis-à-vis modern science, (iii) Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought in the context of present day challenges, (iv) Consciousness Studies as taught in the *Upanishads*, (v) Synthesis of the four yogas as taught by Swami Vivekananda and *Bhagavad-Gita*, and (vi) Harmony of religions as lived and taught by Sri

Ramakrishna. He has a good number of publications on the above subjects in the journals of Ramakrishna Order and of various organizations.

Swami Atmapriyananda participates on invitation in various religious and educational seminars, symposia, colloquia, workshops and conferences in India and abroad organized by Universities, research institutes and religious organizations on the subjects of his interest as mentioned above. He toured Europe twice during 2008-2009 on invitation to act as a Resource Person at international and national yoga conferences in Italy organized respectively by *Sarvayoga International* and *Italian Yoga Federation*. As a member of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, an arm of Elijah Interfaith Institute, a global organization working for interreligious understanding and peace, he attended on invitation a conference at Haifa, Israel, in October 2009 on *The Future of Religious Leadership*. He was an invited speaker at the Parliament of World Religions organized in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009, on *The Training of Religious Leadership in a Multi-religious World*. He attended on invitation a meeting of religious leaders of various world religions at the 'Guerrand Hermes Forum for the Interreligious Study of Mysticism and Spirituality', a project of the Elijah Interfaith Academy and Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, held at Marrakesh, Morocco, during 22-26 February 2011. On his way back, he had lively talks and interactions with groups of interested spiritual seekers at Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

During March-May 2012, he again visited the following countries abroad:

1. Marrakesh, Morocco, to attend the second meeting of the Guerrand Hermes Forum for the Study of Mystical and Spiritual Life, organized by Elijah Interfaith Institute, held during 15-18 March 2012,
2. Oxford, UK, to attend a meeting of the Elijah Board of

- Religious Leaders, organized by Elijah Interfaith Institute, held at Oxford during 18-21 March 2012,
3. Curitiba, Brazil, to attend the second meeting of the Executive Council as a member of 'World Day of Prayer and Action for Children', a global organization working for holistic welfare of children with Secretariat at New York, during 21-24 March 2012,
 4. New York, USA, to attend the first meeting of the Executive Council as a member of 'World Day of Prayer and Action for Children', a global organization working for holistic welfare of children with Secretariat at New York, during July 2011,
 5. Assisi, Italy, to attend the third international yoga conference of 'Sarva Yoga International', Italy, held during 29 March 1 April 2012,
 6. Vedanta Centres of the Ramakrishna Mission in USA, viz., Ridgley Manor, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Olema Retreat, Berkeley, Los Angeles' Hollywood centre, Santa Barbara centre, Trabuco centre for talks, discourses and interactions on spiritual matters,
 7. New York to attend a High Level Meeting convened by the Royal Government of Bhutan, upon the invitation from the Prime Minister of Bhutan, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 2 - 4 April 2012 to discuss the developing of a new economic paradigm 'Gross National Happiness' in place of 'Gross National Product' or 'Gross Domestic Product'.
 8. South Africa during the first two weeks of May 2012 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the starting of the Ramakrishna Centre in South Africa. He visited and spoke at the main centre at Durban and the satellite centres at Chatworth, Phoenix, Pietermaritburg, Ladysmith and Johannesburg.

The Science of Life and Living

– Swami Vivekananda's Worldview*

Let us reflect upon the following three anecdotes before we ponder over Swami Vivekananda's worldview about the science of life and living.

Anecdote One

Swami Vivekananda once had an encounter with Ingersoll, the famous agnostic. He provoked Swami Vivekananda by saying: 'Whatever you might say, I believe in squeezing the orange dry, for I know that this life is all that I'm sure of. So, I believe that one must make the best of it.' This is the well-known Charvaka view.

In a sparkling repartee Swami Vivekananda said:

'Is that so? I too preach squeezing the orange dry. But then, I have my own method of squeezing. I know that my life is eternal therefore I am not in a hurry. I am not afraid and I enjoy the squeezing. Squeeze the orange in my way, and you would get every drop!'

Anecdote Two

Once the Maharaja of Khetri asked Swami Vivekananda: 'Swamiji, what is life?' Swamiji's instant reply was: 'Life is the unfolding and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down.' Swamiji would always say that life is one constant struggle—against nature, against circumstances, against one's own inner propensities— one continuous struggle. From birth, a child is left to struggle against circumstances, outer and inner, which constantly tend to crush it out of existence.

Swami Vivekananda used to illustrate this with the picture of a huge locomotive running at tremendous speed and a tiny worm on the rails desperately struggling to move out of the track to save its life. Which is greater? The locomotive has tremendous power, can crush the worm a million times over. The worm is apparently powerless. But, the locomotive after all is a machine. It has no self-consciousness. It is run by somebody who has the throb of life force coursing through his

* Published in *Vedanta Kesari*, April 2006

entire being. The worm, on the other hand, is a living thing. It has its own little will and its own survival instinct. It can struggle its way through life. That makes it infinitely greater than the giant machine.

Roger Penrose's Prologue in his famous book *Emperor's New Mind* is a beautiful illustration of the life versus non-life problem, specifically the man versus machine dilemma that is assuming alarming proportions in the present day. Penrose's story in the Prologue is as follows:

The greatest super computer in the world is being inaugurated — a machine that could handle several billion calculations in a microsecond. Pose any problem, and it would not even be a split nanosecond before the answer is flashed on the screen. Among the audience are scientists, mathematicians, engineers, bureaucrats, political heavyweights and of course, the inventor of this super-intelligence. The inaugural ceremony consists in asking the first question of this super machine and the prerogative should naturally go to the honourable members of the audience. 'Who will put the first question?' the inaugurator asks. All the wise men of science and engineering look at one another in dismay. Who would be so foolish as to expose one's ignorance before this mighty giant, near-omniscience? The silence is broken by the shrieking voice of a little boy. 'May I put the first question, sir?' asks the boy. 'O come on,' says the inaugurator, hardly hiding his smile at the innocence of this foolish little boy. The boy asks: 'How does it feel to be a computer?' The super computer begins to respond. Its lights — red, yellow and orange — begin to blink and wink. Seconds pass, minutes pass and it is more than an hour. The computer goes on and on with its elaborate calculations. Finally the answer flashes on the screen: 'I don't know.' The entire audience bursts into laughter, at the plight of this super-intelligence being unable to answer a simple question.

Penrose was building up a case against artificial intelligence (AI) and against the so-called 'strong' AI protagonists. The man versus machine conflict as exemplified by the Kasparov versus Deep Blue fight for superiority is a wonderful modern re-enactment of the Puranic

Bhasmasura story — the great Lord Mahadeva who endows the *asura* (demon) with superior power is Himself threatened with destruction at the hands of that power. Human civilization is desperately struggling to create gigantic super machines at whose hands it appears to be willing to get annihilated ultimately.

Anecdote Three

One of Swami Vivekananda's American disciples was quoting from Shakespeare: All the world is but a stage in which we are all actors come to play our part in this cosmic drama. Swami Vivekananda quietly listened and said: 'But, Madam, I think a little differently. I think the world is a big circus in which we are clowns come to tumble down.' The disciple was flabbergasted. She exclaimed: 'But Swamiji, why is it that we tumble down?' Swami Vivekananda smiled and said: 'Well, nobody compels us to tumble. We like tumbling down, and that's what makes us tumble. When we are tired of it, we quit.' (cf *New Discoveries*, 6:156)

Here, Swami Vivekananda is taking a very different but remarkable point of view about life. We are free, and we depend on none else for our happiness. We tumble down and make a mess of things because we like tumbling down and are fond of making a mess of things. Blaming others, external facts, outer circumstances etc for this tumbling and mess is in fact the cause of our sorrow. Once we understand that we ourselves are the makers of our destiny, we carry our own life in the palm of our hand, and we alone are responsible for what we are, then all egoistic pretensions would vanish and sorrow would cease.

This is a secret that one learns through hard knocks and blows which come to everyone in life. Through all these struggles, tears and smiles, ecstasies and agonies, going up one moment and coming down the next, there is one lesson that we learn: we are free and therefore we alone are responsible for what we are. Don't blame the external factors, but analyze yourself, introspect, delve within, look to inner causes, if you should look for causes at all in the first place.

The Message

The message conveyed by these anecdotes is quite clear. In the first place, according to Swami Vivekananda, life is all about struggle. From beginning to end — it is an endless and continuous struggle of a being 'against circumstances tending to press it down.' This unending struggle, this incessant battle is what Swami Vivekananda characterizes as the 'divine worship.' In his Bengali poem titled *Let Mother Shyama (Divine Mother Kali) dance there*, Swamiji writes:

'Unceasing battle is indeed the worship of the Divine [Mother Kali]. Let not continuous defeat in this battle unnerve thee at all. Pulverized, pounded be all self-centeredness, base cravings and vain self-esteem. The heart be thus made the cremation ground; And let Shyama (the Divine Mother Kali) dance there.'

'To be a hero in the strife' of life is the one message that is conveyed, loud and clear, through all these anecdotes and sayings of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda takes life with the perfect nonchalance and dispassion of a supreme witness. Yes, life has to be taken seriously and be fought out—its prizes and beatings, victories and defeats, successes and failures, bouquets and brickbats, accolades and insults, commendations and condemnations ought to be taken in the spirit of a fighter. But then, it is equally true that life ought not to be taken too seriously. It is a game and should be played in the spirit of the game, come defeat, come victory. Swami Vivekananda writes in his famous poem *The Song of the Sannyasin*:

'Let one put garlands on and another kick thy frame;
Say not. No praise or blame can be
Where praiser, praised, blamer, blamed are one.
So be thou calm, Sannyasin bold.
Say, Om Tat Sat Om.'

On another occasion Swami Vivekananda wrote: 'It's great fun'.

'There is neither rhyme nor reason in the universe! What reason binds Him? He the playful one is playing these tears and laughter

over all parts of the play! Great fun, great fun! ... It is a funny world, and the funniest chap you ever saw is He, the Beloved Infinite. Fun, isn't it? ... a school of romping children let out to play in this playground of the world. Isn't it? Whom to praise, whom to blame, it is all His play. They want explanations. But how can you explain Him? He is brainless, nor has He any reason. He is fooling us with little brains and reason, but this time he won't find me napping. I have learnt a thing or two: beyond, beyond reason and learning is the feeling, the 'Love', the 'Beloved'. Ay, *sakhe*, fill up the cup and we will be mad.' (Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, page 367.)

In the above passage, Swami Vivekananda reveals himself as the ecstatic lover of the Infinite Lord who is the Beloved of his soul. It is He who has assumed so many forms and is playing and making us play through smiles and tears this game called life. From this highest position of self-abnegating and universal Love, life's fulfillment consists not in fight and struggle, but in quietly melting away in an expanse of all-encompassing Love that is God Himself.

If we could but realize that all the beings with whom we play this game of life are our own selves, nearer to us as our very being, then there would be no scope for rancour or resentment, acrimony or animosity towards any one. For, isn't the 'other' is also *me*? If the teeth bite the tongue while eating, do we knock off the teeth or cut off the tongue? Or, would the teeth blame the tongue or the tongue the teeth? Why so? Because the teeth and the tongue are equally *me* — parts of one and the same being, serving one and same person? The tongue is the teeth's very own and the teeth are the tongue's very own? Where is then is any room for rancour or animosity or for that matter any iota of disharmony?

This perfect and peculiar blend of the serious fighter and the nonchalant onlooker, the desperately struggling soul and the delightfully playing child is Swami Vivekananda's vision of what life is all about. It is a *complete, holistic vision* which combines the global and the local in a unique synthesis. This unique vision is more a theme for reverential meditation and inward feeling than of intellectual

understanding or analytical reason. This synthesis of local and global perspectives — locally serious and globally mirthful — is the state of *bhavamukha* that Sri Ramakrishna and other great Avatars (Incarnations of God) constantly dwelt. While you are *in* the play, play it with all seriousness. This is the local locus. But global vision of the *entire* play as great fun is the cosmic focus. Being focused in the cosmos, this global vision gives you the power to look on the entire play with perfect detachment, absolute equanimity, and childlike joy. The realization of this intermingling, the co-existence of order and chaos — in fact, the emergence of order from chaos — endows us with a unique *weltanschauung* that releases us from the bondage of thought, the network of conceptualization. Readers who are aware of researches in chaos and the close interlinking of order and chaos would know the beauty of both. The physics Nobel prize-winner Prigogine's book *Order Out of Chaos* is an example. Once this new vision opens up, life becomes full of meaning, because it is only then that one realizes the utter futility of the search for a meaning in it! Meaningful life would, then, melt away into a life of joyful meaninglessness! Rather, it would become a life of real Fullness (*purnatva*) for it is lived in the lap of the perfect balancing of meaningfulness and meaning-less-ness. No thoughts, no past or future, no wants, no desires — perfect stillness.

Two Viewpoints

- (1) Life has a purpose. It has a meaning. Struggle and strive. You would arrive at the meaning.
- (2) O no, life has no meaning or purpose. It is perfect chaos. There are a thousand things, a million things one does not understand, and one does not find meaningful. It is a meaningless game we are forced to play. Play it as a child would. A child does not look for the meaning. It is just content to play, cheerfully, joyfully, and with perfect self-abandon.

These, then, are the two points of view, the two worldviews. The blend of the two, the balancing of the two, and the perfect synthesis of the two in the depths of one's consciousness engenders a new

weltanchuuang that opens up the gates of the Heaven of Freedom. This realization catapults one to a realm in which there is neither the one nor the many, neither being nor non-being, neither pleasure nor pain — the world of duality then ceases and the inner being sinks into an undivided, unbroken, homogeneous mass of Awareness (*akhandam, avyapadesyam, ekatmapratyaya saram, vijnana ghanam*). And the strange but beautiful fact of life is that this Awareness is what we are, in our real nature. Forgetting this true nature of ours, we hypnotize ourselves with thoughts such as: 'O I'm weak, I'm little, I'm small, that man is my enemy, this woman is my friend, this person is mine, that being is not mine,' and so on.

Getting out of this delusion, de-hypnotizing ourselves of the horrible nightmare that we are weak and small is the essence of what Swami Vivekananda taught. This is the sum and substance of Vedanta, the ancient Indian wisdom. This is all about life that Swami Vivekananda exhorted us to practice — this unique unitary vision. Only then would one find real meaning and fulfillment in life. There is no other way to peace and blessedness — *naanyah pantha vidyate ayanaaya*.

The ICAR Vichar Manch, primarily was started as a Forum to learn from the experiences of the eminent persons of India and abroad who have pursued their specific interests in diverse fields, ranging from their profession to theology, philosophy, fine arts, music, films, literature, culture, television and social sciences etc.

