The April issue of Vivekananda Review begins with a discussion of the opportunities and challenges in understanding Swami Vivekananda’s thought. His vision was so broad that unless we make a conscious effort to be broad ourselves, we may miss the full implications of his ideas.

Prof. Reid Locklin of the Department of the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto presents an article on the concept of integration of personality from the Christian perspective. This article is based on his talk at a Seminar on this theme organized by the Vedanta Society of Toronto in September 2013. It introduces some interesting ideas for Hindu-Christian dialogue that deserve further study.

Dr. Prema Nandakumar, an independent researcher based in Srirangam (India), has over the last fifty years published many interesting scholarly works on various religious and literary topics. In her article, she examines the role that the great teacher Sri Ramanuja played in the evolution of Swami Vivekananda’s thought regarding service.

Prof. Kumar Murty of the University of Toronto presents an article on the discovery of the source of the Nile. The British explorer John Speke, who in most accounts is credited with this discovery, explains that an ancient map that was produced in India guided him. It is fascinating to see labels on this map, with the Nile itself referred to as “the River Cali or Great Krishna” and the area of East Africa through which the Nile flows as “Chandrasthan”. This is consistent with Swami Vivekananda’s view that the Egyptians had an Indian origin.

Volunteer Opportunity

Circulation Manager

The Vivekananda Review requires a volunteer to serve as Circulation Manager. The role of this individual will be to develop and maintain an up-to-date circulation list and to communicate with subscribers. Ability to create and maintain a database and good communication skills will be essential. It will be the responsibility of the Circulation Manager to insure that readers receive issues of the Vivekananda Review either in electronic or paper formats, according to their specified preference. Interested individuals are requested to write to the Chief Editor indicating their past experience and their time availability.

Light comes to individuals through the conscious efforts of their intellect.

Swami Vivekananda
Understanding Swami Vivekananda: Opportunities and Challenges

SWAMI KRIPAMAYANANDA

What Swami Vivekananda has given us cannot be overestimated. He has given us important insight into many aspects of human civilization, including history, philosophy, culture, music, and art. Most importantly, he has described, analyzed and explained the spiritual ideal — its reality, its various manifestations, and the methods that can be used to realize it.

He has given us directions for spiritual life in clear and engaging language. He has expressed profound ideas in a manner that everyone can understand. He has given us powerful new symbols, such as, for example, the swan-serpent, which helps explain the four-fold yoga. He has expressed the essence of religion, both in theory and practice, in his pithy Viveka sutras, beginning with “Each soul is potentially divine…”. And he established organizations which continue to study and practise these ideas and propagate them to the whole world. No, Swami Vivekananda’s contribution cannot be overestimated.

However, it can be underestimated. Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of a person who wanted to sell a diamond. He showed it to a vegetable seller who said, ‘I will give you one seer of eggplants for this, not more’. Only when he showed it to a diamond merchant did he get a proper reaction. The diamond merchant immediately understood the value of what he was being offered.

Sometimes I wonder if we are behaving like the vegetable seller when we try to understand the contributions of great teachers like Swamiji. In fact, Swami Vivekananda himself must have been aware of this since he once said: “If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done!”.

As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Swamiji’s birth, I think our biggest challenge is to try harder to understand the full extent of his message. It is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity for us to realize not only our own spiritual progress but of all humanity’s. We have always to remember the twin ideal enunciated by Swamiji, namely the spiritual progress of the individual and the well-being of the whole world.

Narendra and Sri Ramakrishna

Long before Narendra became Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna could already see his future greatness. He used to praise him in front of established personalities of society and predict that he would be far greater than them. At the time, people – even well-wishers of Narendra, such as fellow devotees – thought Sri Ramakrishna was exaggerating. But Sri Ramakrishna was completely committed to truth. He could not utter anything that was not true. It was just that his vision and understanding were so deep and extended so far that he could see the potential of Narendra long before there was any external manifestation.

Reading these incidents a century or so later, we are apt to think that Sri Ramakrishna was foretelling Narendra’s success in Chicago and elsewhere. I think his vision was much deeper than that. Sri Ramakrishna described Narendra as a sage who in some sense embodied humanity. And when we examine Swamiji’s teachings, we see that he frequently exhorts everyone to manifest the perfection that is within. This embodies the entire spectrum of human endeavour.

Swamiji and Human Perfection

Spiritual life, for Swamiji, was not defined in a narrow or exclusive way. Quite the contrary, for he said: “… the fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish, for the Vedanta teaches oneness, one life throughout”. This means all our endeavours can be vehicles for spiritual growth, and of course he stressed the importance of education in aiding that growth, not by preaching this dogma or that dogma but by helping each individual manifest his or her own perfection.

“Education”, he said, “is the manifestation of the perfection already in man”. Moreover, he made it clear that the “manifestation of perfection” takes different forms at different stages in our growth. At one stage, it may take the form of perfecting a skill or an art or some talent while at another stage, it may take the form of understanding and compassion. All such manifestations are to be encouraged as they are all part of spiritual growth.

Swamiji predicted that from Belur Math, there would be established a university that would spread the light of knowledge to all corners of the world. In this context, I am thrilled that the Vivekananda University has
taken shape and is teaching its students advanced subjects in the arts and sciences, and also the art of research, that is, the discovery of new things.

I want to emphasize that by ‘knowledge’ we mean everything. Students at the university study mathematics, physics and many other subjects. All these disciplines are necessary if they are to manifest their inner perfection. Moreover, like all serious universities in the world, the Vivekananda University is trying to expand the frontiers of knowledge by engaging in research of various kinds. In time, the discoveries that result will attract the attention of the world. I am reminded here that Swamiji often used to quote the Gita: “tasmat tvam uttishta, yasyo labhavsa” (Therefore do thou arise and gain fame). These discoveries will be for the good of the individual as well as the rest of the world.

At the Toronto centre, we are working with the University of Toronto to encourage academic excellence under the banner of Swamiji’s name. The University awards an annual Vivekananda Graduate Prize to a master’s or doctoral student in any discipline who shows academic excellence, financial need, and who best embodies Swamiji’s ideal of education. So far, 15 such awards have been made in a wide range of disciplines from social work to medical physics.

During the 150th anniversary of Swamiji’s birth, the Vedanta Society of Toronto worked with the University to create the Vivekananda Graduate Fellowship in Mathematics, to be awarded annually to an international student who is in a doctoral program in mathematics at the University. The first award will be made this year.

Meanwhile, the Toronto centre has started a Vidya Mandir (school) to teach children knowledge and culture, moral and ethical values and a spiritual perspective on life. The Vidya Mandir has completed 10 years and is working on teacher training, curriculum development, and adult education.

We regard these endeavours as central to our mission of spreading Swamiji’s ideas. The recipients of these awards and the students in our Vidya Mandir might not attend pujas or services; however, we are encouraging them in their own pursuit of perfection while, at the same time, planting the seed of Swamiji’s name and thought, which will fructify in due course. As devotees of Swamiji, we must strive for perfection in all avenues of human endeavour and achievement, and encourage and assist others to do the same. All this is a part of spiritual life.

Another achievement during the 150th-anniversary year is the launch of a publication titled Vivekananda Review: The aim of this bi-monthly journal is to encourage and attract academic study of Swamiji’s ideas, especially in the context of other world thinkers.

In course of time, we are hopeful that such study will result in the teaching and study of Swami Vivekananda’s thought in university courses. One of the reasons this has not happened already may be that academics, especially in the West but perhaps in India as well, tend to view Swamiji only in a religious context. This tendency is a serious challenge to the full understanding of Swamiji’s ideas. Religion, as the term is commonly understood, especially in the Abrahamic traditions, tends to imply a certain narrowness (dogma, observances, etc.), whereas in Vedanta — and in Swamiji’s thought in particular — the meaning is much broader.

We want to point out that Swamiji can be studied as a philosopher and as a thinker who has something important to say about many different fields. I encourage the academic community to help us by submitting analytical research articles about Swamiji’s thought. There is a great opportunity here. We have so far completed the first year of publication of Vivekananda Review, consisting of six issues. We hope this journal will stimulate further study of Swamiji’s ideas.

Swamiji and Culture

The other major challenge in the understanding of Swamiji’s thought is culture. As a ‘son of India’, Swamiji is imbued through and through with Indian thought and culture. However, his message transcends cultural confines. Sometimes, I think we are not clear about this. We have to be careful not to encumber Swamiji’s thought in the cultural identifications and associations to which many of us are accustomed.

This is particularly important when we are speaking with those who belong to other cultural traditions. In Toronto, we see this manifested in several ways. The city itself is one of the most multi-cultural in the world. Here, we have people from all parts of the globe with all kinds of cultural and spiritual traditions. We know Swamiji’s ideas are relevant to all people. The question is, Can we present those ideas without necessarily encumbering them with a particular cultural perspective? Again, this is both a challenge, and an opportunity.

One of the ways the Toronto centre has risen to the challenge is by engaging in multi-faith seminars and discussions. Such events help us understand each other in terms of our different spiritual perspectives. But we need to pay attention to — and respect — different cultural perspectives as well. It seems to me that there is another large opportunity here for us to learn from these different perspectives and present Swamiji’s ideas appropriately.

Another activity that cuts across cultural boundaries and has met with a lot of support is our Soup Kitchen. Our members prepare food and take it to a distribution centre where it is served to the needy. This work has generated a lot of enthusiasm among our members, as well as appreciation from the community. It is a way of spreading Swamiji’s ideas (in this case, the worship of God in man) without encumbering it in any kind of cultural baggage.

We are fortunate that such an amazing personality as Swami Vivekananda entered our world as recently as 150 years ago. In the grand scheme of things, 150 years is but the twinkling of an eye. His thought, his ideals, and his presence are still very real and immediate.

We are also fortunate to be given the opportunity to serve in his mission of spreading those ideas and helping everyone to realize their inherent perfection. In this, we have to be careful not to inadvertently narrow the scope of Swamiji’s thought. Therein lie the challenges and the opportunities. I pray to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji that they help us understand Swamiji’s thought and not to underestimate its scope and reach.

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NOTES
1 Complete Works, Volume 1, p.124.
2 Life of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 2, p. 652.
4 Complete Works, Volume 4, p. 358.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Personality Integration Through Personality Disintegration: A Christian Perspective

REID B. LOCKLIN

Individual theologians and Christian traditions vary widely in their assessment of the significance of the individual personality and the means of its integration — if, in this life, it is possible to speak of such integration at all.

In his classic study *Christ and Culture* the American Reformed theologian H. Richard Niebuhr contended that, throughout history, Christians have viewed the relationship between Christ and the social and cultural matrices in which they lived in various ways. He enumerated five primary models, some of which — such as “Christ Against Culture” and “Christ and Culture in Paradox” — envisioned the relationship in terms of dualism or discontinuity, whereas others — such as “Christ of Culture” and “Christ Above Culture” — envisioned significant continuity between the Christian proclamation and the dominant culture. Niebuhr himself followed a middle path, which he associated with the Gospel of John, the patristic writer Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and the Protestant reformer John Calvin (1509-64), among others: “Christ the Transformer of Culture.” With the dualists, this ‘conversionist’ view starts with the assumption that the demands of the world and the demands of Christ are in fundamental contradiction. To this shared conviction, the conversionist adds a vision of history as “an upward movement, the rising of men’s souls and deeds and thoughts in a mighty surge of adoration and glorification of the One who draws them to himself.”

Niebuhr’s analysis offers a useful entry point for considering a Christian vision of personality integration, insofar as the relationship between Christ and a particular individual mirrors that between Christ and a whole culture. First of all, we can note that Christians are no less diverse in their approaches to the former than to the latter. Individual theologians and Christian traditions vary widely in their assessment of the significance of the individual personality and the means of its integration — if, in this life, it is possible to speak of such integration at all. Second, following Niebuhr’s own conversionist approach, it suggests that integration, in the Christian vision, must proceed by means of disconfirmation and indeed disintegration as its first step. In the words of the Gospel of Matthew, quoted above, Christians are not called to perfect their personal selves, but to lose them; in the formulation of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, one must first die to oneself before being raised again. If personality refers to my own, individual self as I experience it in everyday life, this personality is not to be integrated at all; it is to be set aside in favour of the perfectly integrated personality of Jesus the Christ.

In this essay, I will explore this notion of personality integration through personality disintegration in three movements. First, I will survey several approaches to salvation from the letters of Paul the Apostle, highlighting the theme of participation in...
Christ as the dominant motif of his thought. Second, I will further develop the notion of salvation extra nos, “outside ourselves,” both as this has been articulated in classical Christian tradition and as it has been critiqued and reformulated by contemporary interpreters. Finally, I will reflect briefly on the significance of this understanding for Hindu-Christian dialogue in the 21st century.

Paul’s Vision of Salvation: Three Metaphors

One of the reasons Christian tradition is so diverse is that its scriptural traditions and earliest layers of interpretation themselves represent significant theological diversity. Just as the Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gītā have produced many different traditions of ritual practice, of bhakti devotion and of Vedānta, so also the Christian New Testament speaks with many voices and is susceptible to diverse interpretations. This is true of the canon as a whole; it is also true of individual scriptural authors such as the Apostle Paul.

In his certainly authentic letters and even more so in the broader corpus identified with him, Paul draws on a variety of images and metaphors to describe what it means to speak of “salvation in Christ.” For my purposes in this essay, it is sufficient to touch on three of the most important images from these letters: the legal metaphor, the territorial metaphor, and the metaphor of participation. I take up each of these in turn.

When Christians speak of salvation, and perhaps even more frequently when others speak about Christian understandings of salvation, the language employed is often that of a courtroom drama. Human beings are envisioned as standing convicted of a crime against God and humanity, on their way to death row; Christ acquits such persons of this conviction through his death on the cross. Case closed. The reason Christians often speak this way is, of course, because the New Testament sometimes speaks this way, not least the Apostle Paul. In the fifth chapter of Romans, for example, he writes that “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (5:8). The result? An acquittal or justification “by his blood” (5:9), “justification and life for all” (5:18). Elsewhere, Paul will describe the death of Christ as a “sacrifice of atonement by his blood” (Romans 3:25), a sacrificial offering that overcomes the alienation between God and humankind created by sin. Human beings are, in this vision, rendered passive witnesses of a legal exchange carried out by Christ on their behalf.

Such a vision of salvation is part and parcel of the Christian world view; it is persuasive in its simplicity, and it is existentially powerful for those who experience it as liberation, as release from the oppressive yoke of sin and death. But it is not the primary understanding of salvation, at least not for Paul. A second set of metaphors that Paul invokes even more frequently employs the language not of law, but of territory, understood in the literal: in faith, the disciple of Christ dies to his old self as a first installment in his participation in a new, corporate life inaugurated by and comprehended in the resurrected Lord. If there is a distinctly Pauline meaning of the Sanskrit term advaita, “not-two, not-different, non-dual,” it is something like this: the new selves that Christians hope to become are envisioned as standing convicted of a crime against God and humanity, or being under Sin to living in the Spirit. The death and resurrection enable the person who has faith in Christ to make this change, by sharing the transfer which was first made by him.

The imagery here is similar to the territorial metaphor except that the “territory” in this case is personal: it is none other than Christ the divine self. Again in his Corinthian correspondence, Paul speaks of the dominion of sin as a state of existence “in Adam” and the dominion of life as a state of existence “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22; cf. Romans 5:12-17). Through faith and baptism, believers die to their old selves “in Adam” to rise “in Christ,” to enter into mystical participation with the human and divine selfhood of Jesus the Christ.

This is also the force of the passage from Romans, cited at the beginning of this essay: “The death [Christ] died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:10-11). The formulation “in Christ” (in Greek, en Christo) is intended in a sense not far from the literal: in faith, the disciple of Christ dies to his old self as a first installment in his participation in a new, corporate life inaugurated by and comprehended in the resurrected Lord. If there is a distinctively Pauline meaning of the Sanskrit term advaita, “not-two, not-different, non-dual,” it is something like this: the new selves that Christians hope to become through baptism and a life of faith is not-different from the divine and human selfhood of Christ.

A New Selfhood Extra Nos: ‘Killing My Old Man’

In 1981, the evangelical Christian rock group Petra produced a song provocatively titled Killing My Old Man. The song itself is fairly unremarkable — even a bit cheesy — and it certainly lacks the layered
complexity of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, its title nicely captures the problem Christian tradition faces when taking up a topic like “personality integration.” To the degree that integration of my present self presupposes its preservation and seamless transition from lower to higher, or from imperfection to perfection, this would seem to distort the most fundamental claims of Paul and the broader Christian tradition. If my natural self is part and parcel of this old, sinful aeon destined for destruction at the end of time, if it carries with it the penalty of death “in Adam,” then it stands in basic contradiction to the new self I receive in Christ. The point is never to integrate or perfect this old self. The point is to kill it.

At issue here is what the Protestant Reformers sometimes called the “Alien Righteousness” of Christ, and the call for Christians to look for their salvation, extra nos, “outside of ourselves,” outside of our natural capacities, outside of our ordinary hopes and expectations, outside of our empirical personalities. The Reformed theologian George Hunsinger captures this dynamic well:

The pattern of grace in the radical overthrow of sin is the pattern of Aufhebung [sublation]. Fallen human creatures are affirmed insofar as they are creatures, negated insofar as they are fallen, and raised again to new life. They are affirmed, negated, and then reconstituted on a higher plane, not partially but completely, not gradually through an existential process but once-for-all through a disruptive, eschatological event that is at once centered in the cross of Christ and yet inclusive of the entire world.¹

Note that, in this account, integration of the self at a higher plane is the imagined goal and end of salvation. The question is not what happens to the self, but how and by whose initiative. With H. Richard Niebuhr’s conversionist model of “Christ the Transformer of Culture” in mind, we can say that transformation and higher integration are indeed possible, but they are not possible from the perspective of the empirical self on its own terms. The possibility is instead opened for empirical selves by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, extra nos, outside ourselves. Though Catholic and Orthodox Christians would quibble with many aspects of Hunsinger’s account, they would largely agree on this: salvation, and thus also personal integration, take their start not from any innate capacity of the empirical individual, but from God’s prior initiative in Christ.

What does this look like, in the lived experience of a Christian disciple? Given that the diversity of Christian disciples exceeds the diversity of Christian traditions by several orders of magnitude, individual experiences of integration through disintegration will necessarily vary enormously. But I might venture a couple of generalizations. First of all, according to the Apostle Paul’s own understanding, this present, empirical life carries with it a struggle between the already and the not yet of salvation, and thus between old self and new self. For most Christians, then, the transformation that is bestowed “once for all” is experienced “again and again” in the exigencies of everyday life. One’s personality never becomes more integrated in the sense of growth and development of an innate capacity, but the death of self and new life in Christ can become ever more spontaneous and habitual in the life and mind of the disciple. Yet such progress, if it can be named as such, always carries with it the constant temptation of egosim — a self-assurance and an arrogation to the empirical self that always comes to this self only extra nos, in the unique, “finished” work of Christ.⁸

Second, this life of discipleship will take the form of a death of self in at least two different senses. The first of these senses I have treated in some detail already as the death of the old self and new life in Christ. But the pattern of Christ’s life, as revealed in the Christian gospels, is itself cruciform: it takes the form of self-gift, of self-sacrifice for the good of others, of a death by torture undertaken out of love. So too, then, for those disciples who claim this life and this divine selfhood as their own. Even here, however, one must exercise some care. Feminist scholars, among others, have pointed out that even this teaching has been subject to enormous distortion, as Christ’s suffering on the cross has been used by Christian authorities to disempower women and racialized minorities, to discourage those who might seek or claim a selfhood unjustly taken from them by the sinful structures of a fallen world.⁹ For some, particularly those in positions of privilege, self-gift may well take the form of self-abnegation; for others, the self that is set aside may be the passive self, the self that has permitted injustice against itself or others through complicit inaction. “Self-denial well appropriated,” writes Carolyn Osiek, “is the free and willing surrender of the sinful self,” whatever distinctive forms sinful selfhood may take in particular social and cultural contexts.¹⁰

The Apostle Paul spoke of a diversity of gifts in the Christian community (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-31), and this has been reflected not only by the diversity of Christian traditions themselves, but also by the diverse forms of community and religious life that cut across them. So also individuals and communities are enjoined to cultivate an ongoing practice of discrimination between old self and new self, between sinful self and redeemed self, between false self and true self; in the particular, diverse contexts in which they find themselves. What joins all such discernment together is the singular intention to negate this false self and to cultivate a new life and a new self patterned on the self-emptying love of Jesus. This is the fundamental task of personality integration in Christian tradition, and — ideally — Christians strive to achieve it, in the confident hope that what they are striving for has already in fact been achieved for them and in them, in the life, death and resurrection of this same Christ.

Integration through Disintegration: Possibilities for Hindu-Christian Dialogue

At first glance, the portrait of personality integration I have offered may not seem to hold much potential for Hindu-Christian dialogue. For one thing, it presumes a strong doctrine of sin and of the fallen nature of our empirical selves, which I take to be fundamental to any authentic representation of Christian tradition. Such an emphasis is also, perhaps more problematically, fundamental to not a few Hindu critiques of Christianity, including those offered by the eminent Swami Vivekananda. For Vivekananda, progress in spiritual life is not helped by diminishing the innate capacity of humankind in this way. Quite the opposite! Instead of negation, one ideally builds on successive layers of affirmation. “To the Hindu,” he insisted at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions, “man is not traveling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth.”¹¹ Such a phrase seems, at first blush, significantly removed from any notion of dying to the old self in order to rise anew, at least as I have developed this theme here.

I would contend, however, that the picture changes significantly if one presses a bit beneath the surface. Consider, for example, the following exchange between a teacher and a student from the pages of The Thousand

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Teachings (Upadeśasāhasrī) by the great eighth-century Advaita Vedāntin Ādī Śankarācārya:

If the pupil who has thus grasped the marks indicative of the highest Ātman according to the Śrutis and the Smrītis wishes to get out of the ocean of transmigratory existence, [the teacher] should ask him: ‘Who are you, my dear?’

If he answers: ‘I am a Brahmin’s son belonging to such and such a family. I was a student — or, I was a house-holder — [but] now I am a paramahansa wandering ascetic. I wish to get out of the ocean of transmigratory existence infested with great sharks of birth and death;’ [then] the teacher should say: ‘My dear, when you are dead your body will be eaten by birds or will turn into earth right here. How then do you wish to get out of the ocean of transmigratory existence? Because if you turn into ashes on this bank of the river you cannot get across to the other side of the river.’

This passage, at one level, offers an example of discriminating enquiry (viveka) between eternal and non-eternal, between the true self and the empirical self. The innermost self, the unseen seer and witness of all passing, empirical phenomena is the eternal Ātman; everything that this innermost self perceives as an object — “my” body, “my” mind, “my” personality — is an-Ātman, non-self and non-eternal. This false self, the empirical self, is destined only for death and destruction on this side of the ocean of rebirth.

However, it seems telling to me, as a Christian interpreter of this text, that such discernment takes place not in the third person but in the second person, i.e., a teacher looking a student in the eye and saying, “No.” According to Sankara’s model teacher, this empirical self is simply not destined for eternal life, at least not according to its own phenomenal reality. Strictly speaking, there is no way that this empirical self, possessed of birth, family and stage of life, can become a liberated self, free from the repeated suffering of rebirth. There is no way from here to there, no possibility of graded progress from lower to higher. Instead, the model disciple is called to shift his existential focus, to set aside his identification with this false, empirical self in favour of the already-liberated, eternally free selfhood of Ātman.

The point, one might say, is never to integrate this empirical personality in and as the divine self. Liberation comes to the disciple extra nos, through a process of discriminating enquiry and negation of the attributes of that false self that keeps us in ignorance and bondage. Hindu-Christian dialogue, from this point of view, might be construed as a shared practice of discernment aimed at helping one another die to our false selves of ignorance and sin in order to rise anew, again and again, as we journey together in this passing life.

And what do Christians gain from this exchange? In addition to the cultivation of good company, which is essential for any seeker, Christians might also be fruitfully reminded that the liberation that comes to us extra nos, entirely beyond the capacity of this empirical self, also represents the foundation and innermost reality of this same self. Christian tradition has always held that it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, that works in nobis, in our hearts and minds, to join us with the resurrected Christ. The Spirit, teaches Paul the Apostle, bears witness within us that we have received new life in Christ, and the Spirit groans within us as we await its final consummation (Romans 8:15, 23). The great medieval sentence collector Peter Lombard took this idea a step further, contending—against the weight of both prior Christian tradition and later critics—that authentic, self-giving love should not be regarded as a created grace or gift of God. Instead, it should be viewed as the unmediated presence of God the Holy Spirit, who is that love in the mind and heart of the Christian disciple. The fundamental task of Christian discipleship becomes, on this reading, less a matter of membership or moral striving than a kind of ongoing, self-conscious epistemological shift, a continual practice of hearing, reflecting upon and recollecting the Spirit of Christ in us so as to identify ever more fully with that Christ in thought and action. Insofar as Christians clearly affirms that this Ātman is the innermost self of each and every conscious being, the other hand, in practice, liberation itself comes to disciples precisely beyond the capacity of our empirical, phenomenal selves, in the word of the teacher and in the self-effusive, eternally liberated nature of Ātman the divine self. Liberation comes to the disciple extra nos, through a process of discriminating enquiry and negation of the attributes of that false self that keeps us in ignorance and bondage. Hindu-Christian dialogue, from this point of view, might be construed as a shared practice of discernment aimed at helping one another die to our false selves of ignorance and sin in order to rise anew, again and again, as we journey together in this passing life.

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NOTES
Many of you have read Max Muller’s celebrated book, *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, and some of you may, perhaps, have read, in German, Professor Deussen’s book on the same philosophy. In what is being written and taught in the West about the religious thought of India, one school of Indian thought is principally represented, that which is called Advaitism, … and sometimes, it is thought that all the teachings of the Vedas are comprised in that one system of philosophy. There are, however, various phases of Indian thought; and, perhaps, this non-dualistic form is in the minority as compared with the other phases. From the most ancient times there have been various sects of thought in India, and as there never was a formulated or recognized church or any body of men to designate the doctrines which should be believed by each school, people were very free to choose their own form, make their own philosophy and establish their own sects. …

We find that there are three principal variations among the Vedantists. The first school I will tell you about is styled the dualistic school. The dualists believe that God, who is the creator of the universe and its ruler, is eternally separate from nature, eternally separate from the human soul. God is eternal; nature is eternal; so are all souls. … He cannot create without materials, and nature is the material out of which He creates the whole universe. …

The real Vedanta philosophy begins with those known as the qualified non-dualists. They make the statement that the effect is never different from the cause; the effect is but the cause reproduced in another form. If the universe is the effect and God the cause, it must be God Himself – it cannot be anything but that. They start with the assertion that God is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe; that He Himself is the creator, and He Himself is the material out of which the whole of nature is projected. …

What does the Advaitist declare? He says, if there is a God, that God must be both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Not only is He the creator, but He is also the created. He Himself is this universe. How can that be? God, the pure, the spirit, has become the universe? Yes; apparently so. That which all ignorant people see as the universe does not really exist. What are you and I and all these things we see? Mere self-hypnotism; there is but one Existence, the infinite, the ever-blessed One. In that Existence we dream all these things we see? Mere self-hypnotism; there is but one Existence, the infinite, the ever-blessed One. In that Existence we dream all these things we see? Mere self-hypnotism; there is but one Existence, the infinite, the ever-blessed One. In that Existence we dream all these things we see? Mere self-hypnotism; there is but one Existence, the infinite, the ever-blessed One. …

## Schools of Vedanta Philosophy

**Swami Vivekananda**

*(from: The Atman, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 2, pp. 239-253)*

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What does the Advaitist declare? He says, if there is a God, that God must be both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Not only is He the creator, but He is also the created. He Himself is this universe. How can that be? God, the pure, the spirit, has become the universe? Yes; apparently so. That which all ignorant people see as the universe does not really exist. What are you and I and all these things we see? Mere self-hypnotism; there is but one Existence, the Infinite, the Ever-blessed One. In that Existence we dream all these various dreams; It is the Atman, beyond all, the Infinite, beyond the known, beyond the knowable; in and through That we see the universe. It is the only Reality.
V. KUMAR MURTY

Historical narratives acquire, over time, a sense of being infallible and based on self-evident truths. However, they are almost always based on assumptions, which every generation has to re-examine. The article of R. Murty on “What is civilization?” gives an account of Martin Bernal’s theory of the African and Asian influences on Greek civilization. This theory is developed in great detail in Bernal’s multi-volume treatise *Black Athena*. Moreover, Bernal also documents the apparent academic dishonesty of eighteenth-century historians and philosophers in rewriting history so as to obfuscate or minimize this influence. In fact, they produced an account in which Greek thought is seen to have stimulated and guided the development of African and Asian societies.

Bernal’s work is controversial and has been severely attacked by many historians. However, the facts on which his thesis is based seem unassailable and so the diatribes may have less to do with academic objections and more to do with the discomfort caused by relinquishing a theory to which many of us have become accustomed.

Far from being an isolated example, Bernal’s work points to the need to re-examine history as it is presented and to understand and expose the assumptions on which historical accounts are based. For example, one often hears that certain cultures (not all of them non-Western) do not have any well-developed sense of history and this view is used to dismiss such cultures outright. In his work “Silencing the Past”, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, an anthropologist at Johns Hopkins University, exposes the hidden assumptions and weaknesses in this way of thinking:

That such rules are not the same in all times and places has led many scholars to suggest that some societies (non-Western, of course) do not differentiate between fiction and history. That assertion reminds us of past debates among some Western observers about the languages of the peoples they colonized. Because these observers did not find grammar books or dictionaries among the so-called savages, because they could not understand or apply the grammatical rules that governed these languages, they promptly concluded that such rules did not exist.

As befits comparisons between the West and the many subaltern others it created for itself, the field was uneven from the start; the objects contrasted were eminently incomparable. The comparison unfairly juxtaposed a discourse about language and linguistic practice; the meta-language of grammarians proved the existence of grammar in European languages; spontaneous speech proved its absence elsewhere. Some Europeans and their colonized students saw in this alleged absence of rules the infantile freedom that they came to associate with savagery, while others saw in it one more proof of the inferiority of non-whites. We now know that both sides were wrong; grammar functions in all languages. Could the same be said about history, or is history so infinitely malleable in some societies that it loses its differential claim to truth?

The classification of all non-Westerners as fundamentally non-historical is tied also to the assumption that history requires a linear and cumulative sense of time that allows the observer to isolate the past as a distinct entity. Yet Ibn Khaldun’s fruitfully applied a cyclical view of time to the study of history. Further, the exclusive adherence to linear time by Western historians themselves, and the ensuing rejection of the people left ‘without history’ both date from the nineteenth century. Did the West have a history before 1800?

Besides the original account, there is also the difficulty of translating these works so that they may be comprehended. Swami Vivekananda describes his experience in reading an English translation of a French work on Egyptology:

Maspero, a great savant and a highly reputed author on Egyptology, has written a voluminous history of the Egyptians and Babylonians entitled *Histoire Ancienne Orientale*. A few years ago I read an English translation of the book by an English archaeologist. This time, on my asking a Librarian of the British Museum about certain books on Egypt and Babylon, Maspero’s book was mentioned. And when he learnt that I had with me
an English translation of the book, he said it would not do, for the translator was a rather bigoted Christian, and wherever Maspero’s researches hit Christianity in any way, he (the translator) had managed to twist and torture those passages! He recommended me to read the book in original French. And on reading I found it was just as he had said—a terrible problem indeed! … Thenceforth my faith in the translations of those research works has been greatly shaken.4

The examples cited above are only representative of the difficulties in studying history and in unthinkingly accepting accounts of events. Many more such examples can be given, including the very concept of ‘Western civilization’. In this essay, we shall discuss the story of the discovery of the source of the Nile River.

The Nile has played an important role in the civilization of Egypt from time immemorial. According to Boorstein, “The Nile made possible the crops, the commerce, and the architecture of Egypt. Highway of commerce, the Nile was also a freighting way for the materials of colossal temples and pyramids.” Moreover, as Nehru points out, “The whole of Egyptian agriculture and life have revolved round the annual Nile floods which brought the rich soil from the highlands of Abyssinia and thus converted a desert into a rich and fertile land.”

There seems to be some connection between the Egyptian and the Indians which has yet to be fully explained. Swami Vivekananda writes: “The Egyptians entered into Egypt from a southern country called Punt, across the seas. Some say that Punt is the modern Malabar, and that the Egyptians and the Dravidians belong to the same race. Their first king was called Menes, and their ancient religion too resembles in some parts our mythological tales.” Malabar, of course, refers to a coastal area of the South Western Indian state of Kerala.

Despite the importance of the Nile, its source remained a mystery, one which induced adventurers and explorers to take great risks in trying to solve the puzzle. Boorstein writes that “The search for the sources of the Nile, like the search for the Holy Grail, had mystic overtones, which stirred death-defying explorers into the nineteenth century.”

One of these explorers was Sir Richard Burton. From his youth, Burton was a renegade in terms of social norms. As a young man, he enlisted in the army of the East India Company (a private militia set up by the corporation to protect its interests in India). There he is said to have mastered many Indian languages as well as Arabic and Persian. He also became familiar with Indian culture and thought. In 1853, he took a leave from the Company. Disguising himself as a Muslim and adopting the name Mirza Abdullah, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy place of the Muslims, employing all that he had learned of the Arabic language and Muslim customs to ensure his safe passage, for to be discovered would have meant sure death. The following year, he had himself transferred to Aden where, under a grant from the Royal Geographical Society, he began exploring East Africa, especially its large lakes.

It was then that he was joined by John Speke, at the time a lieutenant in the East India Company Militia and later a Captain. This expedition ended in disaster with both Burton and Speke attacked severely by disease as well as by Somali fighters. They were lucky to have escaped with their lives. In spite of this, in 1857, another attempt was made to find the Nile’s source. Following caravan routes and recruiting locals who served as porters, they eventually reached Lake Tanganyika. Burton seems to have felt that this Lake was the source of the Nile, but Speke disagreed and asserted that there was another lake to the North, which proved indeed to be the actual source. The matter obviously could not be resolved from where they were. However, Burton fell seriously ill with malaria, whereupon Speke undertook to explore further. He made a further expedition in July 1858 and was able to discover a large lake to the north, which he named Lake Victoria. He was convinced that this Lake was the source of the Nile. However, his discovery was disputed by Burton as mere speculation.

Many have wondered about the cause of Burton’s disputation, and at least one author feels it might have had something to do with Burton’s bruised ego, as Speke was receiving a lot of publicity for his claimed discovery. Whatever the cause, the Royal Geographical Society funded a subsequent expedition, in which Speke, together with a Captain James Grant and a former slave and now guide, Sidi Mubarak Bombay, returned to Lake Victoria. There, Speke, travelling along the edge of the Lake on the western side, discovered what he named Ripon Falls and declared it to be the source of the Nile.

Judging from this story, one is amazed at what appears to be Speke’s intuition and confidence in making the assertion about the Nile. Indeed, so large is Lake Victoria that one can’t help but wonder how he could have had such confidence. Scientific historian N. Rajaram writes that “Speke’s confidence boggles the mind. All he had done was to touch the southern tip of a vast expanse of water; from where he was he had no conceivable way of knowing that an effluent of the Nile issued from the opposite shore more than two hundred miles to the north. And yet this young man on his first major expedition was utterly sure of his discovery.”

In fact, Speke seems to have been guided by something a lot stronger than intuition. We now know that he had in his possession a map attributed variously to ‘a Benares Pundit’ and a ‘Lieutenant Wilford’. Rajaram writes:

The secret of his confidence lay in a description of the Nile region given him by a Benares Pundit in whom Speke had absolute faith. The Pundit had advised him that the Nile was known to ancient Indians as Nila, and later as Kali. But the real source of the Nile, the Pundit had also told him, were twin snow-capped mountains called Somagiri that lay to the west. Soma is Sanskrit for moon and giri means peak or mountain, and Somagiri therefore are none other than the fabled Mountains of the Moon in Central Africa!

In his book, Speke seems to suggest the source of the map was somewhat different. He says “Colonel Rigby now gave me a most interesting paper, with a map attached to it, about the Nile and the Mountains of the Moon. It was written by Lieutenant Wilford, from the ‘Purans’ of the Hindus.” It is possible Wilford got his map from a Benares pundit (in fact, he was stationed in Benares), but we are not able to discern this from his writings.

The map, given below and reproduced from Speke (1864), p. xxxi, is labeled “The course of the River Cali or Great Krishna through Cutsha Dwip without and Shankha Dwip, proper from the Purans by Liet. Francis Wilford”. Thus, according to this map, the Nile River is called the
‘River Cali’ or ‘Great Krishna’. Note that both Krishna and Kali refer to a dark or dusky colour.

Speke continues:

As it exemplifies, to a certain extent, the supposition I formerly arrived at concerning the Mountains of the Moon being associated with the country of the Moon, I would fain draw the attention of the reader of my travels to the volume of the ‘Asiatic Researches’ (Volume iii of AD 1801) in which it was published. It is remarkable that the Hindus have christened the source of the Nile Amara, which is the name of a country at the northeast corner of the Victoria N’yanza. This, I think, shows clearly that the ancient Hindus must have had some kind of communication with both the northern and southern ends of the Victoria N’yanza.12

The paper by Wilford to which Speke refers is titled “On Egypt and Other Countries Adjacent to the Cali River, or Nile of Ethiopia, from the Ancient Books of the Hindus” and it occupies 174 pages (including 6 pages of commentary by Sir William Jones) of Volume 3 of Asiatic Researches, the Journal of the Asiatic Society.13

Wilford is careful to qualify his remarks as opinions requiring further study. Early in the text, he says

So striking, in my apprehension, is the similarity between several Hindu legends, and numerous passages in Greek authors concerning the Nile and the countries on its borders, that, in order to evince their identity, or at least their affinity, little more is requisite than barely to exhibit a comparative view of them. The Hindus have no ancient civil history; nor had the Egyptians any work purely historical; but there is abundant reason to believe, that the Hindus preserved the religious fables of Egypt, though we cannot yet positively say, by what means the Brahmans acquired a knowledge of them; it appears, indeed, that a free communication formerly subsisted between Egypt and India; since Ptolmey acknowledges himself indebted for much information to many learned Indians, whom he had seen at Alexandria…14

Wilford was stationed in Benares, ‘the centre of Hindu learning’. There, with the help of a Mr. Duncan, he established connection with several Indian scholars. He also relied on the travels of a Mr. Bruce and he states that “…even the outline of the Map prefixed to this dissertation is borrowed from his elaborate Chart.”15

The first thing that strikes one about the map is the naming of various landmarks. The Red Sea is called ‘Arun Odadhi’, which sounds like a corruption of ‘Arundathi’. The general area is labeled as ‘Chandrasthan’, or the land of the moon. We also see Lake Tanganyika and Victoria N’yanza mentioned in the map. These names being of relatively recent origin, we understand that Speke had superimposed his own map on the older one that he obtained from Wilford.

Around the top of Lake Tanganyika are the ‘Mountains of the Moon’. In the Introduction, while describing the geography of Africa, Speke writes: “For instance, we find in its centre a high group of hills surrounding the head of the Tanganyika Lake, composed chief of argillaceous sandstones, which I suppose to be the Lunae Montes of Ptolmey or the Soma Giri of the ancient Hindus.”

The map indicates that the Nile is referred to as the River Cali (Kali). “The same river is also called Nahushi from the celebrated warrior and conqueror, usually entitled Deva-Nahusha, and in the spoken dialects Deo-Naush: he is the Dionysus, I believe, of the ancient Europeans. By the Greeks, Romans and Hebrews, the Nile (which is clearly a Sanskrit word) was known also by the following names: Melas, Melo, AEgyptos, Sikhor, or Sihor, Nous or Nus, Aetos, Siris, Oceanus, Triton and Potamos.”16

Speke writes that

Unyamuezi – Country of the Moon – must have been one of the largest kingdoms of Africa. It is little inferior in size to England and of much the same shape, though now, instead of being united, is cut up into petty states. In its northern extremities, it is known by the appellation Usukuma – country north; and in the southern, Utakama – country south. There are no historical traditions known to the people; neither was anything ever written concerning their country, as far as we know, until the Hindus, who traded with the east coast of Africa, opened commercial dealings with its people in slaves and ivory, possibly some time prior to the birth of our Savior, when, associated with their name, Men of the Moon, sprang into existence the Mountains of the Moon.17

Later, he describes his encounter with the Kitangule River, which, as I ascertained in the year 1858, falls into the Victoria N’yanza on the west side. … Once over, I looked down on the noble stream with considerable pride. About eighty yards broad, it was sunk down a considerable depth below the surface of the land, like a huge canal, … I say I viewed it with pride, because I had formed my judgement of its being fed from high-seated springs in the Mountains of the Moon solely on scientific geographical reasonings; and, from the bulk of the stream, I also believed those mountains must attain an altitude of 8000 feet or more, just as we find they do in Eianda. I thought then to myself, … that these highly saturated Mountains of the Moon gave birth to the Congo as well as to the Nile, …

I came, at the same time, to the conclusion that all our previous information concerning the hydrography of these regions, as well as the Mountains of the Moon, originated with the ancient Hindus, who told it to the priests of the Nile; and that all those busy Egyptian ge-
This account of the discovery of the Nile is fascinating as it introduces several novel aspects to the narrative which are not to be found in the traditional description. Can we substantiate Vivekananda’s assertion that the ancient Egyptians actually originated in Malabar? What is the source of the map that Lt. Wilford put his name on? What other evidence might we find of the presence of people from India in ancient Africa? Far from being the end of the story, this chapter of history clearly needs further analysis in order to fill the various gaps in our knowledge.

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NOTES
2 Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was an Arab historian known for his epic work on world history.
3 Trouillot, pp. 6-7.
4 Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 7, p. 364.
5 Boorstein, p.6.
6 Nehru, p. 740.
7 Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Volume 7, p. 367.
8 Boorstein, p. 6.
9 Rajaram, p. 63.
10 Rajaram, pp. 63-64.
12 Ibid, p. 40. The word ‘N’yanza’ refers to Lake. Note that Speke incorrectly dates the paper of Wilford to 1801 when it actually appeared in 1792.
13 This volume begins with an essay by the President and Founder of the Society, Sir William Jones, in which he states: “M. D’Herbelot mentions a tradition, (which he treats, indeed, as a fable) that a colony of those Idumeans had migrated from the northern shores of the Erythrean Sea, and sailed across the Mediterranean to Europe, at the time fixed by Chronologers for the passage of Evander with his Arcadians into Italy, and that both Greeks and Romans were the progeny of those emigrants: it is not on vague and suspected traditions, that we must build our belief of such events; but Newton who advanced nothing in science without demonstration, and nothing in history without such evidence as he thought conclusive, asserts from authorities, which he had carefully examined, that the Idumean voyagers carried with them both arts and sciences, among which were their astronomy, navigation and letters’; for in Idume, says he, ‘they had letters, and names for constellations, before the days of Job, who mentions them.’ Job, indeed, or the author of the book, which takes its name from him, was of the Arabian flock, as the language of that sublime work incontestably proves; but the invention and propagation of letters and astronomy are by all so justly ascribed to the Indian family, that, if Strabo and Herodotus were not grossly deceived, the adventurous Idumeans, who first gave names to the stars, and hazarded long voyages in ships of their own construction, could be no other than a branch of the Hindu race…” (pp. 2-3)
14 Wilford, pp. 296-297.
15 Ibid, p. 298.
16 Ibid, p. 304.
17 Speke (1864), p. 98.
18 Speke (1864), pp. 256-257.

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Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramanuja

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

When Swami Vivekananda decided to put into action the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna by inaugurating the Mission, the other disciples accepted his agenda. But there were a few murmurors and Swami Yogananda, in particular, could not agree with Swamiji’s turning to social service instead of emphasizing individual salvation. He said the Master was for bhakti and it was to be used as a means for Realisation. He had nought to do with the kind of philanthropic organizations Swamiji was proposing as the Mission’s activities. No doubt such notions had been picked up by him during his sojourn in the West.

Swamiji disagreed and at one stage burst out with the following:

You think you understand Sri Ramakrishna better than myself! You think jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenderest faculties of the heart! Your bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. You want to preach Ramakrishna as you have understood him, which is mighty little! Hands off! Who cares for your Ramakrishna? Who cares for your bhakti and mukti? Who cares what your scriptures say? I will go to hell cheerfully a thousand times, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in tamas, and make them stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of karma-yoga. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or anyone, but of him only who serves and helps others without caring for his own mukti!1

He was deeply moveid and it took some time for him to bring his emotions under control. The fellow-disciples had seen into his soul which flowed with love for his Master and for suffering humanity. They realized “... as never before that the Master was at the back of Vivekananda, working through him”.2 The world knows by now the tremendous service the Mission rendered in Kolkata during the dreaded Plague, in Swamiji’s time, and how under his guidance the Mission has grown into a divine Banyan, encompassing the globe with its life-sustaining branches, ministering to the body as well as the soul.

The disciples had a point when they spoke of Swamiji forming such ideas as a result of both his Western education as well as his visit to the West. But it was neither the education at the Scottish Church College nor his days in America and England that had taught him the need to reorient the ways of the sannyasin toward healing the wounds of humanity. He was a keen student of Vedanta and closeness to Sri Ramakrishna had helped him plunge deeper into Indian religion and spirituality. Nor was he idle for a single day during his wanderings as a parivrujaka in India. He read, he discussed, he watched, he learnt. After getting the Adesh (divine command) while meditating on the Sripada Rock in Kanyakumari, he came to Chennai. His earnest disciple was Alasinga Perumal, a devout Srivaishnava. An Advaitin himself who followed Adi Sankara’s non-dualism, Swami Vivekenanda was also open to other philosophical systems and other religious practices.

During his sojourn in the United States of America, he made a deeper study of Sri Ramanuja’s life and works. What he had heard of Sri Ramanuja’s life made a profound impression on him. He had been revolted by the exhibition of caste-born arrogance among Indians and the isolation of one-sixth of the population as ‘untouchables’. Could this really be the way of India’s sanatana dharma? As he went deep into the lives of Indian sages, he found in Sri Ramanuja a unique personality who gave a new meaning to vedantic life. Vivekananda now saw that there was a way to destroy the demon of caste or at least minimize its ugly manifestations! Swamiji studied the writings of Sri Ramanuja and found new illumination for his future activities to raise India from its fallen state. Comparing Adi Sankara and Sri Ramanuja, he writes:

The movement of Shankara forced its way through its high intellectuality; but it could be of little service to the masses, because of its adherence to strict caste-laws, very small scope for ordinary emotion, and making Sanskrit the only vehicle of communication. Ramanuja, on the other hand, with a most practical philosophy, a great appeal to the emotions, an entire denial of birthrights before spiritual attainments, and appeals through the popular tongue completely succeeded in bringing the masses back to the Vedic religion.3

Sri Ramanuja (1017-1137 A.D.), who was blessed with longevity, had shown great promise as a scholar in Vedanta and took to sannyasa at an early age. He had been an earnest disciple; now he was also a successful teacher. His personal experiences of the Deity would not allow him to dismiss the world as maya, an adhyasa (superimposition). He agreed that Brahman was the One Truth; but the world manifested from Brahman had its own reality. Hence his Vedanta has come to be known as Visishta-
advaita. If he considered the world as real, the joys and sufferings of mankind were also real. And unless the entire humanity was able to overcome suffering, how can one remain lost in one’s own heavenly bliss? If the Lord’s most precious guna was compassion, should we not show the same compassion to those who suffer?

The Acharya’s life gives many instances of his compassionate nature. The most important was his kindness towards the downtrodden poor who had been rejected as ‘untouchables’. Though he was a spiritual head and managed the day-to-day affairs of the premier Srivaishnava temple at Srirangam, Ramanuja was a picture of humility. His disciples Kuruttazhvan and Mudaliyandan assisted him in his work, which included spirituality, philosophy, religious ritualism, medical health, education and social work. By his exemplary life, he taught the common man how to respect people belonging to all castes. For instance, after his ritual bath, while returning from the river Kaveri, he would rest his hand on the shoulder of Urangavilli, a disciple who was not a Brahmin.

There are many instances that speak of the warmth of his heart. When one of the senior Brahmins of Srirangam, Peria Nambi, carried food to the house of the Dalit devotee Maraner Nambi, Ramanuja raised no objection. Maraner Nambi was sick and needed help. When he died, Peria Nambi performed the last rites for his close friend. At this there was a lot of criticism from the public, but Ramanuja quelled it all by standing firmly behind Peria Nambi. He also named the Dalit community as ‘Tirukulaththaar’ (People belonging to Lakshmi’s Fold). Swami Vivekananda must have thought that if Ramanuja could achieve so much a thousand years ago, could not an organized set-up like the Mission achieve miracles? Swamiji says: “Did not Ramanuja feel for the lower classes? Did he not try all his life to admit even the Pariah to his com-

Swami Vivekananda was blessed with a keen historical sense. He saw that though a brilliant Vedantin, Ramanuja knew what would appeal most to persons on the earlier rungs of spiritual evolution. The Acharya’s life gives many instances of his compassionate nature. The most important was his kindness towards the downtrodden poor who had been rejected as ‘untouchables’. Though he was a spiritual head and managed the day-to-day affairs of the premier Srivaishnava temple at Srirangam, Ramanuja was a picture of humility. His disciples Kuruttazhvan and Mudaliyandan assisted him in his work, which included spirituality, philosophy, religious ritualism, medical health, education and social work. By his exemplary life, he taught the common man how to respect people belonging to all castes. For instance, after his ritual bath, while returning from the river Kaveri, he would rest his hand on the shoulder of Urangavilli, a disciple who was not a Brahmin.

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offered here is roti and butter! These legends together with the highly erudite Vedantic writings of Ramanuja inspired Swamiji to no end. He waxed eloquent whenever he began to speak of Ramanuja. As a Sanskrit scholar and Vedantin, he enjoyed reading Ramanuja’s texts, Vedartha Sangraha, Sri Bhashya (a commentary on the Brahma Sutras), Gita Bhashya, Vedanta Deepa, and Vedantasara.

Speaking of the external purity maintained by proper food and the internal purity attained by controlling the emotions, as taught by Sri Ramanuja, Swamiji writes:

Purity is absolutely the basic work, the bed-rock upon which the whole Bhakti-building rests. Cleansing the external body and discriminating the food are both easy, but without internal cleanliness and purity, these external observances are of no value whatsoever. In this list of qualities conducive to purity, as given by Ramanuja, there are enumerated, Satya, truthfulness; Ârjava, sincerity; Dayâ, doing good to others without any gain to one’s self; Ahimsâ, not injuring others by thought, word, or deed; Anabhidhyâ, not coveting others’ goods, not thinking vain thoughts, and not brooding over injuries received from another. In this list, the one idea that deserves special notice is Ahimsa, non-injury to others. This duty of non-injury is, so to speak, obligatory on us in relation to all beings.

Swami Vivekananda was blessed with a keen historical sense. He saw that though a brilliant Vedantin, Ramanuja knew what would appeal most to persons on the earlier rungs of spiritual evolution. Tamil Nadu had temple worship even in the ancient period along with the performance of yagas (velvi). His instituting formal rituals in worship, a combination of mantras, music, dance and food preparations was widely welcomed. He persuaded devotees to give up rajasic worship (such as goat sacrifices) and take to sattvic worship (such as decorating the deities and taking processions on the streets of the village or town involving all the citizens in the worship). Disabled persons unable to come to the temple could now have their heart’s fill of the deity coming in procession on various mounts such as Garuda, Hamsa or Simha. The chariot procession became a great meeting-space for people from far-away places. Ramanuja encouraged the setting up of gardens close to temples and even hospitals with herbal gardens. All this he must have heard from his earnest disciple Alasinga Perumal and others. Swamiji says:

Then came the brilliant Râmanuja. Shankara, with his
great intellect, I am afraid, had not as great a heart. Ramanuja’s heart was greater. He felt for the down-trodden, he sympathised with them. He took up the ceremonies, the accretions that had gathered, made them pure so far as they could be, and instituted new ceremonies, new methods of worship, for the people who absolutely required them. At the same time he opened the door to the highest spiritual worship from the Brahmin to the Pariah. That was Ramanuja’s work. That work rolled on, invaded the North, was taken up by some great leaders there; but that was much later, during the Mohammedan rule; and the brightness of these prophets of comparatively modern times in the North was Chaitanya.7

Swami Vivekananda studied Sri Ramanuja’s Sri Bhashya thoroughly (he had asked Alasinga Perumal to send the book from Madras) and has given a simple and clear account of the argument posited by Sri Ramanuja. Inspired by him, the Brahmagyan Series published an English translation of Sri Bhashya by Prof. Rangacharya and Sri Varadaraja Iyengar. This book was reviewed in the Maharatta on 11 March, 1900. In terms of Vedantic perception of reality, Swami Vivekananda was an Advaitin. But he was conversant with all other interpretations of the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Gita (the ‘Prasthanas Traya’ of Indian philosophical discourse) and spoke of Sri Ramanuja’s Visishtad-vaita with a clarity that even a child could understand:

Ramanuja attributes consciousness to God; the real monists attribute nothing, not even existence in any meaning that we can attach to it. Ramanuja declares that God is the essence of conscious knowledge. Undifferentiated consciousness, when differentiated, becomes the world.8

Kumarila Bhatta, Adi Sankara, Sri Ramanuja and others had helped the Sanatana Dharma survive and attain new peaks as well. With the shrewd sight of a historian, Swamiji must have sought the reasons for the success of Ramanuja as it was his Darsana that spread throughout India swiftly. Of course there were the attractive external ceremonies and rituals, such as the ceremonial showering (Tirumanjana), which attracted the spectacle-loving public. There were also food-offerings, of course, and when food is taken as prasada, it gives great joy. However there was more. Swami Vivekananda refers to Sri Ramanuja’s “great appeal to the emotions.”

Reading about Swamiji, we learn that he loved reciting Sanskrit stotras and even composed some himself. He was a Sanskrit scholar, a master of Panini’s grammar, and could write letters in Sanskrit. Yet when he strummed the tanpura and sang, it was usually Bengali songs, such as Syama Sangit, Brahma Sangit, and the songs of Rabindranath Tagore. Often the Bengali songs would send Sri Ramakrishna into an ecstatic mood and he would begin to dance. And so would they all, including Swami Vivekananda. He was familiar with Vaishnava songs and knew that they had originated in the Tamil hymns of the Alvars of South India. He realised that while Adi Sankara kept to pure Sanskrit, whether for Vedantic discourse or bhakti poetry, Sri Ramanuja had adroitly brought in the Tamil hymnology in a big way. What his predecessors had started was by now firmly ensconced in temple and private worship by Sri Ramanuja. Sanskrit for the intellect: Tamil for the emotions!

The Sanskrit Vedas; the Tamil ‘Marai’. Two rich streams drawing from the infinite wisdom of the ages in a land which had cultivated a culture with a turn to the spiritual all the time. Were they parallel streams? Not so, because the Tamil devotional literature is obviously soaked in the Vedic vision. Sri Ramanuja even became famous for his singing of the thirty Tiruppavai verses by the woman Alvar, Andal (Goda Devi). We are told that his stirring recital earned for him the sobriquet, Tiruppavai Jeeyar. This point had been noted by Swami Vivekananda as a priceless gift of Sri Ramanuja in linking the bhasha literature and music with temple ritualism. He had seen this in Chennai where he did stay for quite some time in 1893. And his dearest disciple was the Vaishnava, Alasinga Perumal.

When the Mission was started, Vivekananda wanted to send a message on the organization’s approach to caste-ism and untouchability. When the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on the 22nd of February, 1898, he invested fifty non-brahmins with the holy thread and gave them initiation with Gayatri mantra. This was a bold gesture indeed, but he had firm faith in the path shown by Sri Ramanuja. He told the disciples that henceforth they could study the scriptures and placed Sri Ramanuja’s Sri Bhashya on the heads of each one of them as a holy witness. Perhaps he spoke to them of what he had heard about the great Acharya who had re-named the dalits as “Thiru-kulathaar” and had given them the right to enter temples and worship the Lord. Perhaps he also spoke to them of one of the Alvars, Tiruppan, who was a Dalit and had sung some of the sweetest Tamil songs on Lord Ranganatha, the residing deity of Sriirangam.

Swami Vivekananda has written at length about Sri Ramanuja and comes to him quite often in his lectures. He was so full of Sri Ramanuja that Bengalis began to ask about the great acharya from the south. There was a real need for a complete life of Sri Ramanuja in Bengali. Thus it came to pass that Swami Ramakrishnananda, who spent long years in Chennai establishing the Mission, wrote a biography of Sri Ramanuja. It is a joy to add that this biography is now revered as a classic, and is certainly a priceless gift of Swami Vivekananda to humanity.

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NOTES
1 Life of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 2, p. 252.
4 Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 219.
5 Incidentally, the same legend is associated also with Melkote (Tirunrayanapuram) in Karnataka where we have a niche of ‘Bibi Nachiar’.
8 Complete Works, Volume 7, p. 39.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
In March of 1997, the Vedanta Society of Toronto, together with the University of Toronto and the Province of Ontario created an award known as the Vivekananda Graduate Prize. Each of the three organizations contributed $7,000 for a total endowment of $21,000. The contribution of the University was through its Endowment Adjustment Fund and the contribution of the Province was through the Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund. The interest from this endowment is used to make an award each year. The first Prize was awarded in 2000-2001 and to date, a total of $11,985 has been distributed to deserving students.

The award is administered by the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto, and is intended to partially support a graduate student at the University who is in a Master’s or Doctoral program. Each spring, the School sends out a circular to all units announcing the prize and inviting nominations. To be eligible, the student must be a full-time domestic graduate student (that is, a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or protected person). Moreover, there must be a demonstrated financial need, as well as a strong academic record. And the student must indicate how, in their view, they exemplify Swami Vivekananda’s ideal of education.

The following text is included with the annual call for nominations:

Vivekananda (1863-1902), a philosopher and saint, said “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life.” He did not consider people as educated just because they could pass some examinations and deliver good lectures. In his words, “The education which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion – is it worth the name...We must have life building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.”

A complete nomination/application must include a completed “Financial Needs Assessment Form”, a copy of the most recent academic transcript showing grades for the last 20 completed courses, a letter of recommendation from a Faculty member familiar with the applicant’s work or addressing the applicant’s academic merit and a statement from the applicant that clearly addresses the relevance of their application with regard to Vivekananda’s ideal of education.

The applications are adjudicated by a Selection Committee consisting of a representative of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and a representative of the Vedanta Society of Toronto who has a university affiliation. With the exception of the year 2008-2009, the Committee recommended that an award be made, and in 2007-2008 and 2012-2013, the Committee actually recommended that two awards be made when they found two equally deserving students. The year 2008-2009 was a year of financial difficulty when the University endowments did not have any payout.

As the table below indicates, winners of the Prize were pursuing diverse fields of study and came from four different Faculties, namely the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Social Work, and the Faculty of Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
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<tr>
<td>Arts and Science</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the Faculty of Eduction (OISE/UT). Of the 15 times that the Prize has been awarded, the table below indicates how many times it was won by each Faculty.

Of the six times that it was won by Arts and Science, two of the winners were in the Humanities (namely History and English), one from Social Sciences (namely Political Science) and three from Physical Sciences (one in Anthropology and two in Botany). The six winners from Medicine covered the fields of Medical Biophysics (2 winners), Speech Language Pathology, Public Health (2 winners) and Physiology.

Besides the cash value of the Prize, the Society acknowledges the winner at the annual September seminar and presents the student with some Vedanta literature related to Swami Vivekananda. The winner is also invited to make a short speech to the Seminar participants about their work and about the significance of the Prize to their studies.

Over the years, there has been some erosion in the monetary value of the Prize due to fluctuations in interest rates. It would of course be desirable to add to the Endowment amount in order to boost the annual payout.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>GRADUATE UNIT</th>
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<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>Sara Sarkar</td>
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<td>Tara Narwani</td>
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<td>Maria Chiu</td>
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<td>2005–2006</td>
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<td>Rastko Cvekic</td>
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