BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Swami Vivekananda was born on Monday, January 12, 1863 to Viswanath Dutta and Bhuvaneswari. He was born as a boon given by Lord Shiva in response to his mother's prayers. His birth was marked by the auspicious constellation of stars and planets. He was destined to usher in a new age of glory for his country. He was going to be recognized as the embodiment of the spiritual and national consciousness of India. He was to become a great apostle of preaching unto the world the gospel of the Vedanta. The child was named Narendranath, and he resembled in many ways his grand father, Durgaprasad who had renounced the world. Naren was a naughty and restless child. He was so turbulent that his mother had to engage two nurses to look after him constantly. At
the same time Naren was also "a sunny-tempered, sweet and loving child, and would scamper to anyone who would take him on his lap."¹

The unique aspect of Naren was that he had a great attraction for wandering monks. He used to delight at the very sight of sadhus. One day he spontaneously gave away his hand-embroidered dhoti to a monk who had come for alms. But the monk tied the dhoti round the head of Naren and went away blessing the boy. Viswanath Datta was very hospitable to the monks. Nevertheless Naren was used to be kept away from the sight of the sadhus. But Naren somehow used to manage and meet the monks for giving them alms. He loved animals and was very fond of the family cow which he adorned on festive occasions. He along with his two sisters decorated the mother cow with garlands and put vermilion on her forehead. He also used to bow down to her and pat her sweetly and gently.

Naren received the first rudiments of education from his mother, Bhuvaneswari. She taught him the glory of the great sages, gods and goddesses of India. He was informed of his great ancestors including his grandfather. She also taught him the tales of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. These epics were used to be read at Naren's house every day. He evinced keen interest in listening to them with rapt attention. "There can be no doubt that the stories from the epics exerted a great influence on his mind."²
Besides these two epics *Bhagavatam* also had a profound impact on him. Naren's maternal grand parents taught him many anecdotes from the epic of Bhakti. Naren learnt many things of the Indian tradition from the singers in the street who recited sacred stories of Rama, Krishna and Divine Mother. Naren's mother took interest in exposing him to songs and dance of the street singers. She realized that "the more often and intimately a child is exposed to the national culture, the better and truer man does become."\(^3\)

It was during this period of Naren's childhood that the seeds of spiritual life were sown in his heart. He was regularly listening to the stories of Ramayana and used to sit in meditation along with elders. One day it occurred to him that he should worship Rama as steadfastly as his elders. He purchased a clay image of Sita-Rama and began to worship it in a room locked inside. He went into deep meditation for long hours unmindful of callings from outside. When the room was broke open Naren was sitting still in meditation undisturbed. It seems he had not heard anything. He was found seated motionless without responding to calls by name. When he was shaken out of his trance, he begged to be left alone. He became a fervent devotee of Lord Rama and decided to devote his life to His worship. Even the thought of marriage scared him, since he had already given his love and loyalty to Sita-Rama, the two very pure personages. "He had learnt to respect deeply their wonderful characters, had admired their loyalty to one another."\(^4\)
Later on Naren began to worship Shiva, the god of renunciation. He instantly loved Shiva since he had the fancy of becoming a monk from childhood. One day he was found moving about nude except for a lion-cloth. When his mother asked about his appearance as a sadhu, Naren cried 'I am Shiva, look, I am Shiva'. He also showed interest in growing long and matted hair. He clearly showed the vivid signs of renouncing the world like Shiva. He said to his mother that he had been a sadhu in the past life like Shiva. He expressed his wish of going back to Him. Naren's mother felt that his son would renounce the world like his grandfather. Her heart sank at the thought that he would one day become a monk. Naren became very fond of sitting in meditation for long hours. One evening he along with his friends had seated in meditation in the worship-hall. A big cobra had come gliding along the floor at the sight of which others took to their heels. But Naren remained lost in meditation unperturbed by the shoutings of his friends at him. When the snake suddenly glided away, Naren said "I knew nothing of the snake or of anything else; I was feeling inexpressible bliss."

Naren used to experience benign visions in sleep every night. He was habituated to fall asleep suddenly and in a peculiar way. A wonderful spot of light would appear in between his eyebrows. The light emitted with changing hues and white radiance. During sleep also he was completely preoccupied with the experience of this
light. Naren thought that it was a natural phenomenon. He never revealed it to anybody until one day when his schoolmate asked him whether he saw a light between the eyebrows. This event remained with him until his demise. It was surely a testimony to a great spiritual past in which Naren's "soul had learnt so well to sink itself in deep meditation that the meditative state had become spontaneous with him."

EDUCATION

It was at the age of six that Naren went to a school, a traditional Indian Pathashala. He went to school dressed in brand-new dhoti and with a mat and a pen. He felt for himself very confident and comfortable in the school but had acquired a vocabulary which very much upset the family's sense of honour. The parents abstained him from going to the school. A private tutor was engaged who taught him at home. Naren began to show the signs of exceptional brilliance. He was very quick in learning alphabets, reading and writing. He had a prodigious memory. Naren used to fall asleep and go into deep meditation even in the class. The teacher used to be angry with him. But when the teacher asked him any question, he could repeat what was taught in the preceding hour. Besides the teachers, his own family members and relatives contributed a lot to Naren's education. He learnt Sanskrit grammar thoroughly, besides the Indian scriptures. Besides the moral lessons, Naren asserted himself as a leader
among his fellows. He was peerless among his contemporaries in bravery and manhood. He loved to play games and was like a king among his playmates. He was a man of kindness, dynamism, restlessness and sometimes impatience. The trait of restlessness took various forms like “adventurousness, ardour, thirst for knowledge and travel, and dissatisfaction with monotony and stagnation.”

Later on Naren was admitted into the Metropolitan Institution for learning English language. But Naren was unwilling to learn the foreign language before becoming the master of one’s own tongue. Naren’s old relative Nrisimha Datta convinced him of the importance of English. Naren followed his advice and learnt English with an earnestness and eagerness. He also learned history and Sanskrit and showed proficiency in them. But he had a great distaste for Mathematics. In this he was like his father “who was wont to speak of Mathematics as grocer’s craft.” But later on he mastered higher mathematics also. Naren’s ability to grasp the subject was exemplary. He could read the books quickly and understand the subject without reading the book line by line. His power of concentration was such that he could get the meaning by just reading the first and last lines of a paragraph or even a page. He said, “Further, where the author introduced discussions to explain a matter and it took him four or five or even more pages to
clear the subject, I could grasp the whole trend of his arguments by only reading the first few lines."

In 1879, at the age of sixteen, Naren passed the entrance examination and got admission into the Presidency College in January 1880. The Professors at the College were mostly Europeans. He completed F.A (First Arts) in 1881 and B.A (Bachelor of Arts) in 1884. Naren’s College days were marked by intense intellectual activity and spiritual upheavals. He pursued History, Logic and Psychology for his F.A. He had chosen the same subjects for B.A. but with a difference that Logic and Psychology had been replaced by Philosophy in the advanced course. He thought of gaining refinement of the mind and sensibility by studying these subjects. He showed interest in literature and rhetoric also. He evinced greater interest in Philosophy and Logic. He made great efforts to master the arts of conversation and debating in English language. He also mastered Western Logic and Philosophy. Naren had the habit of learning the subjects beyond the University curriculum.

It was in November 1881 that Naren heard about Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa for the first time. Professor William Hastie, the renowned scholar was the Principal of the College. It is so happened that one day Prof. Hastie happened to engage the literature subject for Naren’s class. In course of teaching Wordsworth’s Excursion, the Professor had to explain the nature of
trance referred to by the poet. The trance was the ecstasy the poet experienced while contemplating on nature's beauty. The Professor felt that the students could not understand what he was explaining. He further explained that the state of such ecstasy is "the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object, and it is rare indeed, particularly in these days." At the same time, Prof. Hastie mentioned that he had seen only one person who had experienced that serene state of mind. And that person was none other than Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa of Dakshineshwar. It was thus that Naren heard about the saint for the first time. Later Naren met Shri Ramakrishna at the house of Shri Surendranath Mitra of Simulia for the first time.

Naren showed keen interest in the ideals and activities of the Brahma Samaj which sought to reform India. The Samaj aimed to liberalize and at the same time conserve the Hindu tradition. It was founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1828. Roy was a man of gigantic intellect, inflexible will and courage. He aimed at attacking the evils of our tradition that threatened the very existence of our nation. Hinduism will survive only when some of its religious and social customs are removed. Later on Devendranath Tagore and Keshabehandra Sen also became its members. Brahma Samaj offered monotheism in place of polytheism. It questioned the idea of divine incarnation and need for a Guru. It also demanded eradication of caste system for the recognition of the equality of all.
It fought against child marriages and strived for emancipation of women through education and widow marriages. The Samaj captured the imagination of the young Bengalis. Naren too was attracted by it. He thought it was the best institution for solving the problem of the individual and nation. He had the same ideas as advocated by the Samaj. "Thus he espoused the cause of the Samaj with all earnestness, and it was his fervent hope that the strength of thought, depth of feeling, enthusiasm and personal magnetism which was characteristic of Keshabchandra Sen, and through which he influenced his numerous followers, would one day be his."12

In the light of the teachings of the Brahma Samaj, Naren realized the need for love for mother India. He attained a passion to dedicate himself for her redemption. He questioned the blind devotion to the orthodoxy, "the muddy stench of stagnant waters."13 But later on he began to question the misguided rationalism of the reformers of the Brahma Samaj also. The members of the Samaj busied themselves in drying up the mystic foundations of the Hindu Orthodoxy. Naren wanted to preserve both the mystic and the rational content of the tradition. He wanted to revolutionize the human relations in India. But at the same time he appreciated the benefits of adopting the Western Science in India. He wanted to develop India economically through science and technology. He thought that religion is not for empty
bellies and wanted to devote his life to the service of the Indian poor. He said, "Let the study of the Vedanta and the practice of meditation be left over to the future life! Let this body be dedicated to the service of others."¹⁴

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

It was in November 1881 that Naren happened to meet Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa at the house of Shri Surendranath Misra. Ramakrishna instantly felt that Naren was the one who was to carry his message to the world. When Naren entered Ramakrishna's room the latter "was surprised to find such a spiritual soul coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta."¹⁵ At this meet Naren sang a song of Brahma Samaj at the request of Ramakrishna. Naren said that Ramakrishna shed tears of joy by holding his hands. He said that Naren came to him so late and he knew that Naren was the incarnation of the ancient sages. Naren was the representation of Narayana born on earth to remove the miseries of the humankind. Naren felt that Ramakrishna was almost mad for praising him so much. Ramakrishna pleaded with Naren to visit him again without fail to which Naren accepted. When Naren left, Ramakrishna said to his followers that Naren was shining with the light of Saraswati. Naren felt that Ramakrishna was man of genuine renunciation. The spiritual words and the ecstatic states of Ramakrishna were the proof of his greatness as a saint. However Naren wanted to test Ramakrishna by asking him
one question. The question that he asked him was whether he had actually seen God to which Ramakrishna replied in the positive and said, "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense."^16

Impressed by Ramakrishna's answer to his question, Naren felt that Ramakrishna was the only person who dared to say that he had seen God face to face. Ramakrishna was surely a man of perfect renunciation. Although looked insane, he was surely a man of the holiest of the holy, a true saint. Naren felt that Ramakrishna deserved the reverent homage of humanity. Yet Naren was hesitant to accept him as his Master. He did not feel like visiting him again. But yet on a fine day, he set out on foot to Dakshineswar nearly after a month. On his meeting of the Master for the second time, Naren underwent a peculiar experience. When Ramakrishna placed his right foot on Naren's body, Naren felt as if everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into void, and his individuality was merging in an all-encompassing mystery. Naren explained the experience thus: "I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself I cried out, 'what is it that you are doing to me! I have my parents at home.'"^17

The strange experience narrated above brought about a revolution in Naren's mind. Naren was sure that it was not the effect of hypnotism or mesmerism which acted only on weak minds
but something profound which certainly brought about a sudden transformation in him. However the experience was still enigmatic to him. He did not want to come to any definite conclusion about it. And he did not also want to go to Ramakrishna again. But after a few days Naren certainly felt that Ramakrishna should not be dismissed as a lunatic. It is because he was an incarnation of God that he could shatter to pieces a strong man like him. A few days later Naren paid a third visit to Ramakrishna. During this meeting, Ramakrishna went into a trance and touched Naren who immediately lost all outward consciousness. Naren had no idea of what exactly happened to him. But as per Ramakrishna’s account of it, Naren revealed that he was “a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and that the day he knew his real nature, he would give up the body through yoga, by an act of will.”

Since then Naren took Ramakrishna as his Guru. He devoted himself heart and soul to the Master. He accepted everything he said and endeavoured to realize God by being in contact with the Master. Ramakrishna too understood Naren and loved him. He saw in Naren the intense desire for the realization of truth and continued to guide him with love and patience. Hereafter Naren’s life was that of the saint-in-the-making. He was to attain the highest states of mystical consciousness. He was poised for the realization of the supreme reality of perfection and
oneness. The Master openly declared that Naren was very dear to him. He loved him so much because unlike others Naren was gifted both in conversation and spiritual matters. Naren used to lose normal states of mind in deep meditation during nights. He saw light in mediation and raised to a very high plane of the Absolute. To the Master, the disciple was as it were a coin with no alloy whatever. The Master described the pupil as the thousand-petalled lotus, a big receptacle which can hold many things, and like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside. The Master further said thus: "Naren is not under the control of anything. He is not under the control of attachment or sense pleasure. He is like a male pigeon. If you hold a male pigeon by beak, it breaks away from you; but female pigeon keeps still. Narendra has the nature of a man; so he sits on the right side in a carriage. Bhavanth has a woman's nature; so I make him sit on the other side. I feel great strength when Narendra is with me at a gathering."  

THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

After the passing away of the Master in August 1886, many of his disciples gathered at Barangore. Naren headed the congregation. The disciples decided to found the Order of Ramakrishna Brotherhood. Naren practiced intense spiritual austerities and experienced vivid states of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. A few days later Naren along with other disciples went to Antpur. There he took the vow of Sannyāsa in 1886 on the Christmas Eve.
Thus he became a full fledged monk (Swami) of wondering life and began going on temporary spiritual excursions. In 1890 he parted from his fellow disciples and traveled alone as an unknown mendicant. He went first to Varanasi, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan and Rishikesh and returned to Barangore. At Hathras one by name Sarat Chandra Gupta became his first disciple who was rechristened as swami Sadananda. Naren revealed to the disciple the mission entrusted to him by his Master. The mission was the spiritual regeneration of India and the world. Later, Naren met Pavhari Baba of Gazipur who enabled him to go deeper into the spiritual life. He made Naren to get fully absorbed in the Divine. "For twenty one days, Naren was on the point of yielding to this temptation, but the vision of Sri Ramakrishna always came to draw him back."20

Swami took leave of Sri Sarada Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual guide for the disciples after the Master's passing away. He also took leave of the brother monks with a firm resolve to cut himself free from all ties. He went to Himalayas to be alone. This was the great departure in Naren's life. During this time, he also visited the southern places like Mysore, Madras, Trivendrum and Hyderabad. He happened to meet many leading personalities of India. He also visited upon invitation the rulers of the princely states. Among them, it was the Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri who became his good friend and
ardent follower. Maharaja of Mysore assured him of the financial support for going to the West to preach the eternal religion and also to seek their help for India. The poverty and misery of the Indian masses caused his soul burn in agony. The important event in the Southern part of India was his visit to Kanyakumari. There he entered the temple and prostrated himself with great feeling before the idol of Mother Kumari. Then he swam across the sea to a rock off the South Coast. He sat there in meditation on the rock for the whole night. "He meditated on the past, the present, and the future of India, the causes of her downfall, and the means of her resurrection. He then took the momentous decision to go to the West to seek help for the poor of India and thus give shape to his life's mission."  

From Kanyakumari, Naren went to Rameswaram, Madurai and Madras. In Madras a group of young men headed by Alesinga Perumal received him with great reverence. Swami revealed to them his intention of attending the Parliament of Religions that was about to be convened at Chicago in America. The young men who had already become his disciples raised the funds required for his passage to Chicago. Incidentally, Swami also received an invitation from the Maharaja of Khetri requesting Swami to attend the birthday celebrations of his infant son. Swami accepted the invitation and payed visit to Maharaja who received him warmly. He also promised Swami all the possible help for his trip abroad.
The most significant point of this visit is that the Maharaja advised Swami to assume the name 'Vivekananda'. Thus Swami became Swami Vivekananda. Maharaja took all the care for Swami's journey to America. He saw him off at Bombay on 31 May 1893 on the voyage to Chicago. Swami reached Chicago in the middle of July that year. The Parliament of Religions began on 11 September 1893. More than 7000 people attended the gathering representing various cultures. The representatives of all the major religions of the world were present. Swami felt extremely nervous at the sight of the Parliament. But when his turn of addressing the gathering came, he felt composed. He mentally prayed the Goddess of Saraswati and began his speech with the words 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. "Immediately there was thunderous applause from the vast audience, and it lasted for full two minutes. Seven thousand people rose to their feet as a tribute to something, they knew not what. The appeal of his simple words of burning sincerity, his great personality, his bright countenance, and his orange robes was so great that next day the newspapers described him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. The simple monk with a begging bowl had become the man of the hour."  

After the short inaugural and introductory speech, Swami gave a few more lectures in the Parliament. The subsequent speeches were listened to with rapt attention and appreciation. All
his lectures had universality and oneness of the universe and humanity as the common theme. Delegates of other religions confined to the tenets of their own particular themes. But Swami spoke of the religion of the vastness of the sky and the depth of the ocean. After the closure of the Parliament Swami went on hectic tour of lecturing in the United States. He had signed a contract for a lecture programme with a bureau. Swami addressed at various places and all sorts of audiences. The tour provided him the opportunity of knowing the different aspects of Western life and world. He formed a group of earnest American disciples and offered to teach them Indian spiritual lore free of charge. His stay in America till December 1896 was full of intense activity. Besides lecturing, Swami found a Vedanta Society in New York and trained a group of close disciples at the Thousand Island Park. During his stay in the United States Swami visited Europe and England in particular in the summer of 1895. He gave lectures on Jnana-Yoga there and met prominent people like Capt. Sevier, Sister Nivedita, and E.T. Sturdy. He had also the pleasure of meeting the great genius like Max Muller, and the German orientalist Paul Deussen. During these visits to America and Europe he "laboured hard to give to the West his message of Vedanta as the Universal principle basic to all religions."
THE PHILOSOPHY

The central theme of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is the freedom and dignity of the person founded on the oneness of the spirit and universality of humanity. The Vedantic conception of non-duality and the unity of all beings is at the root of Vivekananda's philosophy. All beings on the earth are the manifestation of the One Spirit, also known as the Self or Atman. We are all the children of the eternal Soul which is all pervading and the sharers of the immortal bliss. We are not the sinners but the holy and perfect beings. We are not the destitutes but the divinities, not the bleating sheep but the roaring lions. We have to shake off the delusion that we are ignorant and inferior. Everybody is the spirit which is ever free and eternal. We are the immortal and blessed. Therefore it is necessary to strive for the realization of the true inner nature. One should not brood over the weakness and not be afraid of committing mistakes. As it is already mentioned it is thinking that makes the human being what he or she is. Thinking is the strength and the remedy lies in thinking about the strength that is within us.

Fearlessness is essential to overcome degradation. The dignified person is one who is free from fear. Fearlessness comes from the realization of the inner strength within us. It also comes from our biological strength. Swami says that a strong body is required for fearlessness. Physical strength is as much necessary
as the mental and spiritual strength. Physical strength makes man bold and courageous. It is also required for the realization of the inner strength. The weak person without physical energy cannot understand the scriptures which teach about the strength and power. Strength is the medicine for the disease of deprivation. Weakness is misery. Physical strength can even move and crumble the mountains. Swami says, "Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words, but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger." 24

Swami further says that it is better to die than to live without dignity. Death is better than a vegetating life. So, one has to exert oneself a lot to attain dignity. Only the man of action can prosper. Only the one who is looking forward can attain freedom from all kinds of bondages. Despair and misery are of one's own making. They are due to one's own laziness and ignorance. A man of infinite energy and courage will never despair and subject himself to misery. He can drive away all misfortune and sorrow. A man of autonomy and freedom will never weep over his condition. He will never succumb to the outward circumstances but fights to change them. The world is at the feet of the man of action. Even the poison of a snake is powerless if one is strong physically, mentally
and spiritually. One has to face the situation and change it without surrendering to it. Swami illustrates an instance of his life to bring home the message of fearlessness, courage and action. "Once when I was in Varanasi, I was passing through a place where there was a large tank of water on one side and a high wall on the other. It was in the grounds where there were many monkeys. The monkeys of Varanasi are huge brutes and are sometimes surly. They now took it into their heads not to allow me to pass through their street, so they howled and shrieked and clutched at my feet as I passed. As they pressed closer, I began to run, but the faster I ran, the faster came the monkeys, and they began to bite at me. It seemed impossible to escape, but just then I met a stranger who called out to me, 'Face the brutes'. I turned and faced the monkeys, and they fell back and finally fled. That is the lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly." 28

The event narrated above shows Vivekananda's conviction that one can change one's life provided one feels total responsibility. One has to face life instead of running away from it. One has to overcome the difficulties of life without accepting them as permanent and insurmountable. We are the makers of our destiny. We are responsible for what we are. We are free to be what we are. We will be good if we choose to be good. We will be inferior if we choose to be inferior. We will be ignorant if we choose to be so. Our thoughts and actions determine what we are. Our
present condition is the result of our past deeds. And our future will be the result of our present deeds. So Swami says that the nature of our deeds determine the nature of life. Good deeds result in happiness and evil ones result in unhappiness. And inaction results in degradation and misery. We have to be good and we have to do good. Being good and doing good is for the good of oneself. Swami says, "We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act."  

Nobody is responsible for my degradation and bondage except myself. It is wrong to blame others for my predicament. It is not correct to blame God for my misfortunes. It is not correct to ascribe the cause of my misery to the ghost or to some supernatural power. Even fate is not responsible for my sorrow and pain. To Vivekananda fate is nothing but what we do. It is the principle that our actions are the causes of our lives. What we sow, so we reap it. We are the makers of our fate. It is only the coward who says that it is his fate to be without dignity. But the strong people will say that we are the makers of our fate. We have to make use of the opportunities that are always there at our disposal. Those who suffer in bondage and indignity are those who
do not rise to the occasion. Only, the irresponsible people lead the lives without dignity and freedom. Swami says, "This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone'. That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else, I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves."27

Thus, Vivekananda's call for human dignity consists not only in his idea that human being is of the nature of divinity. It also lies in his idea that each one can realize divinity all by oneself. Human dignity consists in his idea that each one of us is the sole creator of our destiny. There is no use in complaining and grumbling. One has to do one's duty and put one's shoulder to the wheel. One has to see the secret of performing one's duties and see the miracle that sincere work does. One can shape one's life by doing good deeds. One has to perform actions with purity, patience and perseverance. Then one will succeed in attaining a good life of dignity. We have to exercise not only our faculties of reason and intellect but emotions of love and compassion. Our life has to be governed by the laws of reason, purity, patience and love. Man is bound by these laws only and not by the laws of nature. Perfection does not lie in being obedient to the laws of nature. It lies in following the
laws that are created by oneself. Swami says, "Every thought we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time, it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself."  

A responsible person achieves a life of dignity by rebelling against nature and society. He struggles to realize his true nature which is of freedom, perfection and dignity. He manifests his divinity through controlling nature, external and internal. He accomplishes this goal either by work, worship, meditation or knowledge. True religion is the realization of inner divinity and dignity either by one or more or all these methods. True religion also consists in helping others to realize their divinity and dignity. It consists in striving to become divine with diligence. Realization of inner divinity gives man the strength of character. It enables man to stand up on his own legs both spiritually and materially. It provides man with the individuality which is of dignity, knowledge, perfection and prosperity. Swami says, "Arise awake and sleep no more; within each of you, there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe this, and that power will be manifested... If you can think that infinite power, infinite knowledge and
indomitable energy lie within you, and if you can bring out that power, you also can become like me."29

THE MISSION

Swami Vivekananda wanted to translate the metaphysical truths of the Vedanta into practical life. He aimed at bringing about dignity and freedom into the lives of the Indian masses and women through Vedanta. He visualized India without poverty, disease and inequality. He sought to turn the abstract Vedanta into a practical Vedanta. In order to accomplish the task of actualizing the ideals of Vedanta, Vivekananda founded the Order of Ramakrishna Mission in the year 1897. The Mission had its centres at Madras and Calcutta presently known as Chennai and Kolkata, respectively. Following are the main aims of the Mission:

1. To propogate the truths which Ramakrishna preached and practiced for the good of humanity and to help people to practice them in their lives for their temporal and spiritual development.

2. To direct the activities of the Mission for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be only so many forms of one undying Eternal religion.

3. To train the youth, both male and female so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the welfare of the masses.
4. To promote arts and industries for the material benefit of the people.

5. To have two wings of action, namely, the Maths (Monasteries) and the Ashramas (Conventions for retreat) for the education of Sannyasins and lay brethren (householders) who are willing to devote their lives to teach of others.

6. To depute the members of the Order to foreign lands for establishing the spiritual centres for creating a close relationship and spirit of mutual help and sympathy between foreign and Indian centres.

7. To have no connection with politics since the aims and ideals of the Mission are purely spiritual.

The Order was of social, humanitarian, panhuman and also apostolic nature. It did not oppose reason to faith, modernity to tradition, science and religion. The main object of the mission was the upliftment of the Indian masses and women. The aim was to rouse the countrymen and women immersed in Tamas and enable them to stand on their own feet. The people of India should be inspired with the spirit of Karma-Yoga. Vivekananda once declared that he was the servant of those who serve others. Karma is more important than Jnana, Bhakti and Mukti. The mission took up several programmes of serving the poor soon after its inception. In 1897, it fed and nursed thousands of poor people suffering from
famine in the Murshidabad district of Bengal. It founded an orphanage at Mohula for the abandoned children. It educated the children without any distinction of caste or belief. It also taught them the trades of weaving, tailoring besides reading, writing and arithmetics. In 1898 the Mission worked for the protection of the people attacked with plague that had broken out in Calcutta. The Mission has been serving the poor in various ways till today all over India and abroad for the welfare of the downtrodden. "The Mission also adopted the holy custom of making the anniversary of Ramakrishna a festival for the poor, and of feeding thousands on that day at all the centres of the Order."  

Swami Vivekananda expressed the opinion that the rich and the wealthy have a duty towards the poor. The members of the Math with their austere living should convince the rich of their responsibility for the masses. They should induce the wealthy to give money for the service of the poor and the distressed. He regretted that very few rich men of India thought about the miserable people of India. The poor are the backbone of India. It is their labour which produces food, shelter and clothing for all. Nobody sympathizes with the toiling lot of India. It is because of the callous attitude of the rich, the Indian poor are turning Christians. It is not only poverty that is driving the poor to embrace Christianity. It is due to lack of sympathy and equality of treatment they are leaving the Hindu-fold. It is due to lack of
fellow-feeling and the sense of charity (Dharma) that made the poor to become averse to the race of their birth. Vivekananda said, "There is only 'Don't touchism' now. Kick out all such degrading usages! How I wish to demolish the barriers of 'Don't touchism' and go out and bring together one and all, calling out, come, all ye that are poor and destitute, fallen and downtrodden! We are one in the name of Ramakrishna?"  

Swami Vivekananda was firmly of the view that unless the poor are raised, India will never be awake. The poor have to be provided with food, clothing, education and enlightenment. They labour hard night and day. Yet they fail to eke out a proper living. We have to remove the veil of ignorance from their minds. The same Brahman and same Shakti that is in us is there in them also. The difference is only in the degree of the manifestation of that Spirit. The Maths and people in general have to help the poor and ignorant to fully realize the Spirit. India cannot develop as long as a great section of people are excluded from its mainstream and treated as untouchables, subhuman and worthless. So Swami said, "In the whole history of the world, have you ever seen a country rise without a free circulation of the national blood throughout its entire body? If one limb is paralyzed, then even with the other limbs as a whole, not much can be done with that body- know this for certain."
Swami kept on reminding his disciples of the ideals and activities of the Mission till the day of his demise on 4th July 1902. He exhorted them to build their character and serve people in accordance with Vedanta. He strived hard to instill the message of his Master into the minds and hearts of the monks. He paid attention to training them in the art of loving humanity. He asked them to be sensitive to the problems of the poor. He taught them to inculcate all-embracing love which is truly divine. Swami never tired of inspiring the monks by his speeches and exemplary conduct. He almost cried everyday at the sight of the sufferings of the masses of India. He was always glowing with the fire of disinterested love for humanity and evinced true patriotism and self-sacrificing zeal. His concern for the downtrodden was indefatigable. His love for the subaltern Indians was god-inspired and inexhaustible. He worked relentlessly for the poor with pure heart and devotion. He proved to his disciples that he was a real worker truly inspired by the ideal of universal brotherhood. Swami dedicated the whole of his life for the accomplishment of the ideals of the Mission with real love and sympathy. "By preaching Vedanta, by living and moving in Vedanta, by cosmopolitan charity, and by the simplicity, purity, and holiness of his life, Swami Vivekananda solved the problem of the future of his Motherland by holding before the eyes of his disciples, followers, friends, and admirers, nay, before even the whole of India, the ideal of character-building through the light and spirit of Vedanta."
References


3. Ibid., p. 15.

4. Ibid., p. 16.

5. Ibid., p. 19.

6. Ibid., p. 19.

7. Ibid., p. 28.

8. Ibid., p. 31.

9. Ibid., p. 45.

10. Ibid., p. 47.

11. Ibid., p. 48.

12. Ibid., p. 56.


16. Ibid., p. 77.

17. Ibid., p. 78.

18. Ibid., p. 80.

19. Ibid., pp. 91-92.


21. Ibid., p. 10.
22. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

23. Ibid., p. 15.


26. Ibid., p. 31.


28. Ibid., p. 348.


31. Ibid., p. 110.


33. Ibid., p. 618.

34. Ibid., pp. 633-34.