

The Global Village and Vedanta

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The Background, the Reality, of everyone is that same Eternal, Ever Blessed, Ever Pure, and Ever Perfect One. It is the Atman, the Soul, in the saint and the sinner, in the happy and the miserable, in the beautiful and the ugly, in men and in animals; it is the same throughout. It is the Shining One.

The Upanishads are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energized through them. They will call with trumpet voice to the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads.

Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

Spiritual Knowledge Encourages Values

Our age has been called the age of progress and the age of science, but it has also been characterized as the age of tension, anxiety, depression, violence, crime and fear. The new technology also creates fresh new ideas of crime, "crime of multinational nature." As we reflect on this, we find that our evils essentially stem from ignorance about the spiritual dimension of life. Secular knowledge does not give us Self-knowledge; it has given us miraculous control over Nature but has added practically nothing to the control of our emotional life and social behavior. As a result, our life is oriented to "things." We have every kind of possession except self-possession and every form of security except emotional and spiritual security. Spiritual knowledge encourages values that motivate the improvement of human worth. Spiritual insight enriches our subjective life, brings harmony into our life, and helps us to acquire some positive and enduring values.

Human Progress is Based on Spiritual Growth

For most of us, value is associated with "pay, promotion and pleasure." Our life and integrity of character are not taken into account. In this atomic age, everything has changed except our values of life. The time has come for a more practical use of our

moral and spiritual insight, and for greater enthusiasm in pursuing “right conduct.” We are to give up our old attitudes and incorporate a new vision of human progress based on spiritual growth.

Albert-Szent-Gyorgyi, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1937 for his discovery of vitamin C says, “Snakes can grow only by bursting their skins. Moulting has to be a painful process and should it fail, the snake would die. Mankind grows by bursting the outgrown skin of antiquated ideas, thinking, and institutions.” To survive, we have to slough off our thick skin superficial thinking.

Fostering a Spiritual Outlook and Generating Ethical and Moral Culture

Our inner mind is shrinking from lack of spiritual nourishment, while our outer life is overfed and overpampered. Progress does not mean only speed and comfort; it also means having a sense of direction and purpose which culminates in finding fulfillment. Plainly, human progress cannot be meaningful unless values enter into our every activity and thought. Life is significant because it gives us the capacity to striving towards the ideal. Ideals are vital and valuable because they can make our life better, our mind stronger and our outlook nobler. Life begins with values that derive, not from pleasure and immediate experience, but from wisdom transmitted to us from a long human heritage and honoured tradition. Information is not knowledge; knowledge is not wisdom. Knowledge must rise to the level of wisdom in order to bring forth transformation of the personality. Bertrand Russell says:

We are in the middle of a race between this skill as to the means and the folly as to ends. . . . Unless men increase in wisdom as much as knowledge, increase in knowledge will be increase of sorrow.

In actual life, values exist at all levels. The fundamental values of a true community are those which keep society together, bring harmony between the practical and the spiritual, help cultivate the virtues of renunciation and service, and make people humane, cultured, and unselfish. The chief objectives of society therefore are to foster a spiritual outlook and to generate ethical and moral culture.

Civilization is material; culture is spiritual. The former may be compared to the body and the latter to the soul. One gives happiness, the other peace. True culture is the humanizing factor of human life. Without a spiritual outlook, there can be no high and enduring culture. Culture and self-control are synonymous terms. The realm of culture is the realm of values. A multitude of cultured people paves the way to human happiness.

Materialism is a One-eyed Monster

“Excess of knowledge and power, without holiness, makes human beings devils.” Science and technology have released great power—greater than we can control and use for genuine human welfare. According to Aldous Huxley, “War and preparation for war are standing temptations to make the present bad, God-eclipsing arrangements of society

progressively worse as technology becomes progressively more efficient.” These dark forces create chaos in society. War is an industry—it has been developed for economic reasons. Nobel laureate Maurice H. Wilkins said in 1986, “About half the world’s scientists and engineers are now engaged in war industries.” He warned, “I feel very strongly that most of the scientists today are being led increasingly into a rather limited way of thinking, without much open-mindedness, working for material ends.” Nobel laureate George Wald was one of the first scientists to speak out in the Nobel committee forum. He said, “Killing has become a profitable business now.” Modern society has committed the fundamental error of disobeying the law of spiritual development. It has arbitrarily reduced man to an intellectual animal. It idealizes the intellect as the master key to open the secrets of nature. Swami Vivekananda comments:

It is one of the evils of civilization that we are after intellectual education alone and take no care of the heart. It only makes man ten times more selfish, and that will be our destruction . . . Intellect can never become inspired; only the heart when it is enlightened, becomes inspired. An intellectual, heartless man can never become an inspired man . . . Intellect has been cultured, with the result that hundreds of sciences have been discovered, and their effect has been that the few have made slaves of the many—that is all the good that has been done. Artificial wants have been created; and every poor man, whether he has money or not, desires to have those wants satisfied; and when he cannot, he struggles, and dies in the struggle. This is the result. The way to solve the problem of misery is not through the intellect but through the heart. If all this vast amount of effort had been spent in making men purer, gentler, more forbearing, this world would have a thousandfold more happiness than it has today.

Quest for Spiritual Enlightenment

According to Schopenhauer, “Men are a thousand times more intent on becoming rich rather than acquiring culture, though it is quite certain that what man is, contributes more to his happiness than what he has.”

Saul Bellow of the United States received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976. He spoke before the Nobel committee: “The intelligent public is waiting to hear a broader, fuller, and more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we are, who we are, and what this life is for.”

Swami Vivekananda anticipated the responsive attitude of intelligent Westerners willing to accept the teachings of Vedanta. He said,

Many, nay, most of the cultured men and women there are already weary of this competition, this struggle, this brutality of their commercial civilization, and they are looking forward towards something better . . . The thoughtful men of the West find in our ancient philosophy, especially in the Vedanta, the new impulse they are seeking, the very spiritual food and drink for which they are hungering and thirsting. And it is no wonder that this is so.

Is it not curious that whilst under the terrific onset of modern scientific research, all the old forts of Western dogmatic religions are crumbling into dust; whilst the sledge-hammer blows of modern science are pulverizing the porcelain mass of systems whose foundation is either in faith or in belief or in the majority of votes of church synods; whilst Western theology is at its wit's end to accommodate itself to the ever-rising tide of aggressive modern thought; whilst in all other sacred books the texts have been stretched to their utmost tension under the ever-increasing pressure of modern thought, and the majority of them are broken and have been stored away in lumber rooms; whilst the vast majority of thoughtful Western humanity have broken asunder all their ties with the church and are drifting about in a sea of unrest, [and] the religions which have drunk the water of life at the fountain of light, the Veda—Hinduism and Buddhism—alone are reviving?

Refreshing and Life-Giving Tenets of Vedanta

Max Müller, who spent his whole life studying Vedanta, told us what the West can learn from Vedanta:

If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India.

Schopenhauer also greatly valued the impact on the West of Vedanta, “the access to which, opened to us through the Upanishads, is in my eyes the greatest advantage which this still young century enjoys over previous ones.” Schopenhauer made the following prediction: “I believe that the influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century.”

Vedanta can significantly help human beings get out of the death trap they have been lured into by the consumerism of the modern global village. Vedanta is concerned with timeless truth. Hence, it is universal. With its cosmopolitan and humanistic appeal, Vedanta has attracted the loving attention of thoughtful minds because it does not require submission to any authority, whether it is a prophet, teacher or scripture.

According to Vedanta, the truth has not been revealed “once and for all.” The facets of infinite truth are also infinitely expressed. They cannot be compressed into a sealed book. Therefore, Vedanta encourages freedom of thought. Its passion, catholicity and scientific temper combined make Vedanta dynamic—a living philosophy, invigorated with fresh

insights. Its acceptance of diversity prevents it from becoming oppressive and monotonous, static or insipid. It does not pigeonhole truth into a single creed, recommending instead various helpful disciplines suitable for growth in different individuals. Vedanta grants wide latitude for personal choice in religion. That is why, within Hinduism, we find religious expression in a bewildering variety of schools of philosophy, sects and rituals, beliefs and forms of worship.

Vedanta's fundamental teachings include: (1) the impersonality and universality of Supreme Truth; (2) the Divinity of the soul; (3) the unity of existence, that is, oneness of matter and energy or the ultimate oneness of God, man and nature; (4) the harmony of religions; (5) the immanence and transcendence of God who is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe; (6) the cyclic theory of Creation; and (7) Mukti or total freedom from weakness, i.e., spiritual union with the Divine during one's lifetime. Because these are the eternal teachings of Vedanta, Vedanta is also referred to as Sanatana Dharma, the "Eternal Religion."

A Way of Life and a View of Life

Vedanta's assurance of joy, strength, faith and vision in life and its call for devotion, fellow feeling and dedication are of momentous importance today. Swami Vivekananda's clarion call to mankind to realize the oneness of existence—the oneness of God, man and nature—through a living spiritual idealism, is the "new religion of the age."

Discrimination between one person and another originates from ignorance. Properly nurtured, the spiritual impulse in us matures. We learn to abide by ethical principles and become the friends of humanity. Christ says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Swami Vivekananda focuses a floodlight on this point:

The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers – every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you – but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality.

The salvation of Europe (West) depends on a rationalistic religion, and Advaita—the non-duality, the oneness, the idea of Impersonal God—is the only religion that can have any hold on any intellectual people.

Science and the technological revolution have created our modern global village. It is based on secular fulfillment through pleasure and profit. The human being is basically the divine encased within the human body-mind complex. Unless spiritual food is given for the nourishment of the starving soul, unless a higher direction of human fulfillment is given, these modern global plagues in the form of rootlessness, restlessness, crime and all the ills of our lower impulses cannot be checked. Here, Vedanta plays a role in checking these modern ills and restoring balance, sanity and security in life that is based on spiritual culture. In one of his lectures, Swami Vivekananda said: "My ideal can indeed be put into few words and that is to preach unto mankind their inherent divinity and how to manifest it in every movement of life." Swamiji's practical Vedanta comes to play a

great role in alleviating human suffering by providing people with the higher direction that nurtures the spirit. Hence, a new culture based on spirituality will be immensely beneficial to a restless and confused humanity. Swamiji says:

It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. . . . We all know, in modern times, of nations which have masses of knowledge; but what of them? They are like tigers, they are like savages because culture is not there. Knowledge is only skin-deep, as civilization is, and a little scratch brings out the old savage; teach the masses in the vernaculars, give them ideas, they will get information, but something more is necessary, give them culture. Until you give them that there can be no permanence in the raised condition of the masses.

Mind in the West

. . . in the West, psychology is placed on the same plane as all other sciences; that is, it is judged by the same criterion—utility.” (Swami Vivekananda)

“What we call Manas, the mind, the Western people call soul. The West never had the idea of soul until they got it through Sanskrit philosophy, some twenty years ago.” (Swami Vivekananda)

“Man is thus his own greatest mystery. He does not understand the vast veiled universe into which he has been cast for the reason that he does not understand himself.” (Albert Einstein)

“Until not many years ago, the existence of a mind or soul would have been passionately denied by most physical scientists. The brilliant success of mechanistic and, more generally, macroscopic physics, and of chemistry, overshadowed the obvious fact that thoughts, desires, and emotions are not made of matter and it was nearly universally accepted among physical scientists that there is nothing besides matter.” (Eugene Wigner)

The study of the mind is an infant science in the West. According to Carl Jung, “The natural history of the mind is no further advanced today than was natural science in the thirteenth century. We have only begun to take scientific note of our spiritual experiences.” In the Western view, man consists of body and soul. Here, soul is synonymous with mind, ego and consciousness. In the West by and large, no distinction is made between mind and soul; “soul” refers only to the different forms of experiences of a normal human being. This is the general idea in all non-Hindu spiritual traditions.

Vedanta helps rationally minded persons by drawing their attention to the immortal existence of the soul within the body. This pure immortal soul is never tainted by the impurities of mind, nor is it saved by the grace of a savior. When impurity is removed, the bliss of the immortal Self is spontaneously experienced. In the West, soul is not a transcendent entity; it is created. Hence, the impurities of the mind taint the soul (which is mind) and thereby requires the grace of a savior. The concept of the Self or Soul differs

in the West: in Vedanta, the Self is not a created entity; in the West, the soul is created. The doctrine of the eternal, pure, self-luminous and infinite Self was developed in Vedanta alone. In this connection we like to quote Swami Vivekananda:

Every theory of the creation of the soul from nothing inevitably leads to fatalism and preordination, and instead of a Merciful Father, places before us a hideous, cruel, and an ever-angry God to worship. And so far as the power of religion for good or evil is concerned, this theory of a created soul leading to its corollaries of fatalism and predestination, is responsible for the horrible idea prevailing among some Christians and Mohammedans that the heathens are the lawful victims of their swords and all the horrors that have followed and are following it still.

James B. Pratt compares the Christian view with the view of Vedanta:

In the Christian view, the soul's survival of death is essentially miraculous. The soul is conceived as coming into existence with the birth of the body, and the thing to be expected is that it should perish when the body perishes. This is prevented through the intervention of God who steps in to receive the soul and confer upon it an immortality which, left to itself, it could never attain. In India all this is changed. The soul's immortality has never been thought there to be dependent upon any supernatural interference or miraculous event, nor even upon God. There are atheistic philosophers in India, but they are as thoroughly convinced of the eternal life of the soul as are the monists or theists. For in India the soul is essentially immortal. Eternity is in its very nature.

We are paying a very high price for neglecting the age-old vision of leading a happy and peaceful life by following the eternal precepts of religious culture. "Religion (spiritual quest) was replaced by technology as Western man's paramount interest and pursuit," says Toynbee. Bertrand Russell agrees: "The Machine as an object of adoration is the modern form of Satan, and its worship is the modern diabolism. . . . Whatever else may be mechanical, values are not, and this is something which no political philosopher must forget."

An early response to these troubling conditions came from Geraldine Coster, an English psychoanalyst who was captivated by the spiritual philosophy of India and early caught its spark. *Yoga and Western Psychology*, her insightful study of Indian Yoga, came out in 1934 and is the most popular book on the subject in the West since Swami Vivekananda's *Raja-Yoga* appeared in 1899. Five impressions of her book were published between 1934 and 1949 and a new edition came out in 1999. Coster based her comparison of yoga and analytical psychology on the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, tracing the superiority of India's philosophical conceptions of yoga with great acumen. In her introduction she described her inspiration to show that Yoga contains the clue needed by the West if the analytical method and theory is to reach its fullest scope as a regenerating and re-creating factor in modern life:

The more thoughtful among mankind are gradually outgrowing the belief that they as individuals, or that human beings in general, are going to be “saved” by some external intervention, and the idea is gaining ground that salvation is essentially from within. . . . It may be that the old psychological self-knowledge of the East will eventually give to some people an experimental proof of the reality of the world beyond the drop-curtain. . . . I am convinced that the ideas on which yoga is based are universally true for mankind, and that we have in the yoga sutras a body of material which we could investigate and use with infinite advantage. Here is a method of mento-emotional training and development used in the east. It is said on good authority to produce very remarkable and very desirable results, to open to the person who practices its new fields of experience, to give him a poise, and insight, a capacity for enjoyment far beyond anything we have attained. On the other hand there are countless numbers of people in the West whose craving for some direct and real satisfying experience is intense, who feel that life must hold the possibility of something more than they have yet found, and that without this further possibility it is a hollow sham and not worthy living. My plea is then that yoga as followed in the East is a practical method of mind development. . . . [one that is] far more practical and closely related to real life than the average university course. Furthermore, I am convinced that the yoga sutras of Patanjali do really contain the information that some of the most advanced psychotherapists of the present day are ardently seeking. That there is a crying need in the West for something parallel to this eastern yoga many today would admit. The difficulty is to adapt the method to current needs without cheapening the subtleties of real introspective experience on the one hand, or losing its practical value in the maze of pseudo-mysticism on the other. . . . The key to the problem lies in a sympathetic appreciation of the eastern approach to the problems of the interior life. As I have said, this approach is neither atheistic nor superstitious; it is scientific and based upon actual experiment.

The new interest in the West is to study in-depth the human personality. Jung’s famous book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* published in 1933, is a product of deep insight gleaned from the wisdom of the East. Coster’s *Yoga and Western Psychology* was followed by K. T. Behanan’s *Yoga: A Scientific Evaluation* in 1938.

Jacob Needleman confirms this view: “A large and growing number of psychiatrists are now convinced that the Eastern religions offer an understanding of the mind far more complete than anything yet envisaged by Western science.” He is one of many Western psychologists who attest to this preeminence of Indian thought in the philosophy of yoga and its practice. It is believed that more than sixteen million people in the United States and Europe are involved in the Transcendental Meditation Movement popularized by Mahesh Yogi. The Mahesh Yogi University of Iowa received a federal grant for the scientific study of meditation. Secular scholars in the West are gradually realizing the tremendous benefit of meditative life for having inner harmony, peace, and stability as well as for developing a healthy body and mind.

Demand in the Modern World for Meditation and Contemplation

In addition to physicians and administrators, the general public has realized the deep impact of meditation in living healthfully. Many universities, after thorough examination, have shown tremendous interest in verifying the role of meditation, which enables medical patients as well as the general public to maintain a balanced, happy life. The relevance of meditative life, they find, is for our well-being and happiness.

Since the introduction of Vedanta in the West, the idea of meditation and contemplation is being revived there. Professor Huston Smith says: “For the first time since the Renaissance and the Reformation, western society is hearing . . . the suggestion that perhaps the contemplative life is the equal of active life”

We have seen some very earnest seekers here in America sincerely leading a spiritual life. It is the contemplatives who keep the world disinfected. They are the salt of the earth. The popular American writer Robert Arnett came to India in 1988. In his book, *India Unveiled*, he writes:

Through Science of Yoga, India has given the West a far more valuable gift than all the material wealth or technology the West could give in return. Of all the nations in the world, India is the most spiritually blessed. More and more Americans are learning that materialism does not give lasting satisfaction and they are turning to India for spiritual guidance.

Universal Spirit of Vedanta

On account of its broadness of spirit, Hinduism has come to be defined “as a process not a result, a growing tradition and not a fixed revelation.” Toleration and acceptance are peculiar Indian ideas which found expression in the dawn of her culture. A study of India’s relations with the world shows that these ideas of toleration and acceptance have been the world’s greatest fertilizers in the past and are so today.

India’s wisdom is important for our very survival. The distinguishing features of Vedanta that we have described form a synthetic philosophy of harmony among religions that is universal, positive and humane. Peace, tolerance and non-aggression arise from the Vedantic spirit. These values will help to usher in a new climate of friendship and unity among mankind.

Ordinary people as well as many Western thinkers appreciate the modern relevance of Vedanta. Apart from the compelling urgency for peaceful coexistence, the equally pressing need confronting modern man is to find a rational philosophy free from a history of sociopolitical dogmas. Above all else, today’s sensitive, informed minds demand greater spiritual freedom. The experience of deep spiritual fulfillment is certainly more satisfying than any political or economic adjustment we make in our lives. Arnold Toynbee refers to this vital point in *An Historian’s Approach to Religion*: “Thus, in our society in our time, the task of winnowing the chaff away from the grain in mankind’s religious heritage is being forced upon us by a conjunction of social and spiritual circumstances.” Toynbee continues:

It seems to be a matter of historical fact that, hitherto, the Judaic religions have been more exclusive-minded than the Indian religions have. In a chapter of the world's history in which the adherents of the living higher religions seem likely to enter into much more intimate relations with one another than ever before, the spirit of the Indian religions, blowing where it listeth, may perhaps help to winnow a traditional Pharisaism out of Muslim, Christian and Jewish hearts.

Pharisaism has been the besetting sin of the religions of the Judaic family, and this sin has brought retribution on itself in a tragic series of atrocities and catastrophes. The fruit of Pharisaism is intolerance; the fruit of intolerance is violence; and the wages of sin is death.

Toynbee is asking us to differentiate the "essential counsels and truths" from the "nonessential practices and propositions" in order to winnow the chaff from the grain.

Toynbee says, "On the spiritual plane where one inch gained is of greater consequence for mankind than a mile gained in supererogatory additions to man's command over non-human nature, traditional religion is still holding the lead." Western thinkers agree that a broadened outlook is a positive gain. Romain Rolland declared, "The only religion that can have any hold on intellectual people is the rationalistic religion of Advaita Vedanta."

Gerald Heard lectured on Vedanta at Oxford and at the New School for Social Research, Rockford College, and Oberlin College in the United States. He agreed that toleration is necessary for the future spiritual success of mankind. Moreover, he acclaimed Vedanta as the new religion for the West in "Vedanta and Western History," which forms the first chapter of Vedanta for Modern Man. He wrote:

The width and subtlety of Indian thought, the range of its cosmology, the depth of its psychology never, however, succeeded in enlarging that narrow Hebrew scheme of things that has ever since cramped and hobbled the religion of the West. That the Eastern churches of the Levant would have made some use of this treasury of knowledge there can be little doubt when we see how many Indian ideas are present in Origen, how clearly he holds reincarnation, and with what liberality he wished to draw upon the East for insights, for those illuminations from "the Christians that were before Christ."... Indeed we may say that the appearance of Vedanta in the West as a living religion, and not as an academic study, is inevitable just because the religious heredity of the West has now outgrown the tight Hebrew pot of cosmology in which it had been growing for two millennia... And the very breadth of Vedanta, combined with its force, is bound to embrace and develop much that is now lying latent in our Western thought and spirit.

The wide enlightening sweep of Vedanta's cosmology and magnificent doctrine of monism are matched by its penetrating insights on human psychology. Vedanta's unitary vision satisfies our intellect, uplifts our emotions and inspires us to comprehend the unity of existence.

The Indian mind equates philosophy with religion and has always been inclined to this synthetic vision. Its unique dominant tendency is communion with the Divine. This supreme element of Indian culture is followed by the multitudes and widely respected. Because of this, the Indian culture has sustained the ravages of innumerable attacks and proved its vitality.

We have seen that the Vedantic culture lives and continues to invigorate itself with fresh insights from saints. The living ancient spiritual culture of India makes it a nation to be reckoned with. In almost every age, Indian culture produces great spiritual luminaries who invigorate India, adding newness and luster to her. India's fascination for the introspective and contemplative life is joined to the tremendous urge to know the unknown and to outgrow human weakness.

Vedanta is rational in its outlook, accommodative in spirit and scientific in temperament. Thanks to these qualities, to its emphasis on intuitive experience and to its practice of peaceful coexistence down the ages, Vedanta attracts the loving attention of thoughtful minds around the world.

Swami Vivekananda brought the message of Vedanta to the West. Marie Louise Burke wrote of Vivekananda's essential mission in America in *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*:

The fact is that American devotees view him, not as an intellectual expounder of the Vedanta philosophy, but as the first great prophet sent to this country by God. Swamiji himself said that he did not lecture, he gave. . . . Wherever Swamiji went, whatever his external activities, his mission was, first and always, to impart spirituality to whoever was able to receive it. Such was his very nature. . . . Quite literally, he planted the seeds of spirituality deep in the hearts of innumerable human beings, changing the course of their lives forever.”

The positive benefits of Hatha Yoga practices and meditation have shifted the attention of modern scholars and drawn their attention to a new wisdom of the mind. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Ramsey, spoke about the need for spiritual meditation at the College of Preachers in September 1973:

Young people are turning to Eastern religions and bypassing the Christian Church, because it has concentrated so much on practical activity. Contemplation has become very widespread in the modern world, and there is a worldwide longing for it. But the Christian Church has perhaps failed to be contemplative enough. We have concentrated so much on practical activity that Christian religion is being bypassed and young people are turning to other things because we have not practiced our religion in sufficient depth.”

Schopenhauer wrote, “In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life; it will be the solace of my death.” Swami Vivekananda quoted Schopenhauer's remark in order to highlight the

Vedanta philosophy's important contribution to mankind of giving Vedanta's fresh, inspiring message to intellectuals and others. Swami Vivekananda further wrote:

Those who keep their eyes open, those who understand the workings in the minds of different nations of the West, those who are thinkers and study the different nations, will find the immense change that has been produced in the tone, the procedure, in the methods, and in the literature of the world by this slow, never-ceasing permeation of Indian thought.”

Our discussion concludes with these remarks from Arnold Toynbee:

In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only “annihilated distance”; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

Swami Vivekananda writes:

The problem of life is becoming deeper and broader every day as the world moves on. The watch-word and the essence have been presented in the days of yore when the Vedantic truth was first discovered: solidarity of life. One stone in the universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it. There cannot be any progress without the whole world following in the wake and it is becoming every day clearer that the solution of any problem can never be attained on social or national or narrower grounds. Every idea has to become broad till it covers the whole of the world; every aspiration must go on increasing till it engulfs the whole of humanity, nay the whole of life with its scope.

We have given a brief idea of the teachings of Vedanta but without practicing those ideals which will transform our life, make us develop spiritual vision, and give us an enlightened attitude, we will not escape the dangers of the global village. According to Vivekananda, “No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism.”

Although Vedantic ideas were born in India, it does not necessarily mean that India has been able to implement those ideas. The aspect of his mission that Swamiji most cherished was freedom; therefore, his opinion is being given:

There cannot be any growth without liberty. Our ancestors freed religious thought, and we have a wonderful religion. But they put a heavy chain on the feet of society, and our society is, in a word, horrid, diabolical. In the West, society has always had freedom, and look at them. . . . Liberty is the first condition of growth.

Theories of Vedanta may only have some deep impact in the unprejudiced minds of rational thinkers who are unhappy to find that their own religion is not intellectually satisfying, emotionally fulfilling and spiritually uplifting. But due to global awareness, people are consciously or unconsciously generally beginning to appreciate the rational tenets of the Vedanta philosophy. We hope they will realize the need to broaden their mind and make their vision global through the practice of Vedantic ideals. Vedanta asks its genuine followers to develop a holistic attitude towards the world by transforming their life. This is the real message of Vedanta, one which definitely opens a new vista of wisdom to the people of the world who are searching for a universal spirit of religion.

End Notes:

C.W., II: 168.

Ibid, III: 238.

Ibid, III: 193.

Bertrand Russell, Impact of Science on Society, pp. 120-21.

C.W., I: 425.

Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, p. 96.

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C.W., I: 412-15 passim.

Ibid, III: 182.

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