***Swamiji(Swami Vivekananda)*** lived the ideal of fearlessness even as a small child. When he was barely 8 years old.He used to visit a friend of his,whose family had a Champaka tree in their compound. The Champaka flowers are said to be liked by Shiva and were incidentally a favorite of Swamijiâ€™s too. This was Swamijiâ€™s favorite tree and he loved to dangle head down from it! One day as he was swinging from the tree, the old and nearly blind grandfather of the house recognized his voice and approached him. The old man was afraid that the boy might fall and hurt himself or worse that he might lose some of his precious Champaka flowers! He called Naren (which was Swamijiâ€™s pre-monastic name) down and told him not to climb the tree again. â€œWhy?â€ asked Naren. â€œBecauseâ€..the old man answeredâ€¦â€a Brahmadaitya (a ghost of a Brahmin) lives in that treeâ€¦and at night he goes about dressed all in white, and he is terrible to look at!â€ This was news to Naren, who wanted to know what else this Ghost could do besides wander about. The old man repliedâ€¦â€And he breaks the necks of those who climb the tree!â€

Naren simply nodded and said nothing and the old man went away smiling to himself in triumph. As soon as he had gone some distance, Naren climbed the tree again and was dangling back in his former position. His friendâ€¦who was there all alongâ€¦cried outâ€¦â€Naren! The Brahmadaitya is sure to catch you and break your neck!â€ Naren laughed heartily and saidâ€¦â€What a silly fellow you are! Donâ€™t believe everything just because someone tells you! If the old grandfatherâ€™s story were trueâ€¦then my neck would have been broken long ago!â€

And this was **Swamiji as a young boyâ€¦Bold AND fearless with an exceptionally strong common sense!**

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One morning in Sarnath, after visiting the temple of Mother Durga, the Swami was passing through a place, where there was a large tank of water on one side and a high wall on the other. Here, he was surrounded by a troop of large monkeys. They were not willing to allow him to passâ€¦and there was no other way. As he tried to walk past them, they howled and shrieked and clutched at his feet. As they pressed closer, he began to run; but the faster he ran, the bolder the monkeys got and they attempted to bite at him. When it seemed impossible for him to escape, he heard an old sannyasi calling out to him: â€œFace the brutes!â€ The words brought him to his senses. He stopped running and turned majestically to boldly face the irate monkeys. As soon as he did that, they fell back and fled! With reverence and gratitude he gave the traditional greeting to the sannyasi, who smilingly responded with the same, and walked away.

**Be Bold.. Be Strong.. Be Heroes..**

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Swami Vivekananda was having a long trek in the Himalayas when he found an old man extremely exhausted standing hopelessly at the foot of an upward slope. The man said to Swamiji in frustration, ‘Oh, Sir, how to cross it; I cannot walk any more; my chest will break.’

Swamiji listened to the old man patiently and then said, ‘Look down at your feet. The road that is under your feet is the road that you have passed over and is the same road that you see before you; it will soon be under your feet.’ These words emboldened the old man to resume his onward trek.

**Bring light to the ignorant and bring more light to the intelligent..**

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In America, Swamiji was watching some boys. They were standing on the bridge trying to shoot at egg-shells thatÂ  were floating on the river, but they always missed the target. Swamiji took the gun and aimed at the shells. He fired twelve times and every time he hit an egg-shell. The boys asked Swamiji: ‘Well Mister, how did you do it?’ Swamiji said ‘ Whatever you are doing, put your whole mind on it. If you are shooting, your mind should be only on the target. Then you will never miss. If you are learning your lessons, think only of the lesson. In my country boys are taught to do this.’

**Power of concentration**

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Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) was a master story-teller whose words were as magnetic as his personality. When he spoke everyone listened in rapt attention forgetting their work. One day while in school, Narendra was talking animatedly to his friends during a class recess. Meanwhile, the teacher had entered the classroom and had begun to teach his subject. But the students were too absorbed in Narendra’s story to pay any attention to the lesson. After some time had passed, the teacher heard the wishpering and understood what was going on! Visibly annoyed, he now asked each student what he had been lecturing on. None could answer. But Narendra was remarkably talented; his mind could work simultaneously on two planes. While he had engaged one part of his mind in talking, he had kept the other half on the lesson. So when the teacher asked him that question, he answered correctly. Quite nonplussed, the teacher inquired who had been talking so long. Everybody pointed at Narendranath, but the teacher refused to believe them. He then asked all the students except Narendra to stand up on the bench. Narendra also joined his friends and stood up. The teacher asked him to sit down. But Narendra replied: ‘No sir, I must also stand up because it was I who was talking to them.’

**Honesty and Truth are the best policy**

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Before he left London, one of his British friends put this question to him: `Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years’ experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?’ Swamiji said: `India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha!’

**Now the very dust of India has become holy to me !**

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**Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached…**

[**Swami Vivekananda Jayanthi on 12th January**](http://www.spiritualbangalore.com/knowledge-center/articles/swami-vivekananda-jayanthi-12th-january/)

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In spite of her innumerable linguistic, ethnic, historical and regional diversities, India has had from time immemorial a strong sense of cultural unity.Â  It was, however, Swami Vivekananda who revealed the true foundations of this culture and thus clearly defined and strengthened the sense of unity as a nation.

Swami Vivekananda gave Indians proper understanding of their countryâ€™s great spiritual heritage and thus gave them pride in their past.A spiritual genius of commanding intellect and power, Vivekananda crammed immense labor and achievement into his short life, 1863-1902.Â  Youthful Vivekananda embraced the agnostic philosophies of the Western mind along with the worship of science.

When Narendra stepped into boyhood, his naughtiness grew. He was a natural leader of the children in the neighborhood. His companions bowed to his decision always. Once a landlord threatened the children saying, “There is a demon in the tree and he swallows children.” Narendra was not impressed by this threat. He settled down on a branch. The other boys took to their heels. Narendra waited for several hours, but the demon did not appear. So, he declared that the landlord’s story was a spoof. Narendra loved to tease his sisters. Meditation, too, was a sport to him. But as he meditated he became oblivious of the whole world. Not even a lizard or a snake moving near him could disturb his concentration.

Even as a child Narendra had great respect for sanyasis or ascetics. He would give away anything to anybody if asked for. On his birthday, he would wear new clothes, wouldn’t he? If a beggar asked for aims he would give away the new clothes. From that day, his mother would lock him up in a room whenever a beggar passed by the house. But every beggar knew Narendra’s nature very well. So beggars would stand near the window of Narendra’s room. He would throw to them anything he had. The spirit of sacrifice and renunciation was already blossoming in him.

In leisure time his mother would tell him the story of the Ramayan. He could not sleep unless she told him a story. Then he would be all ears, forgetting his study and play. He had great reverence for Lord Hanuman. Once he sat before the idol of Lord Shiva, with his body all smeared with ash. His perplexed mother asked him, “Naren, what’s all this?” He smiled and said, “Mother, I’m the Lord Shiva.” The mother feared that her son would become a sanyasi,.

At the same time, vehement in his desire to know the truth about God, he questioned people of holy reputation, asking them if they had seen God. He found such a person in Sri Ramakrishna, who became his master, allayed his doubts, gave him God vision, and transformed him into sage and prophet with authority to teach.

One day in November 1881, Narendra went to meet Sri Ramakrishna who was staying at the Kali Temple in Dakshineshwar.Â  He straightaway asked the Master a question, which he had put to several others but had received no satisfactory answer: â€œSir, have you seen God?â€Â  Without a momentâ€™s hesitation, Sri Ramakrishna replied: â€œYes, I have.Â  I see Him as clearly as I see you, only in a much intenser sense.â€Â  Narendra said to himself, “Till today no one had told me he had seen God. This man looks mentally deranged; possibly he is even mad. However, it is not proper to judge without investigating.”

A month passed. Narendra went alone to Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna was resting on a cot in his room.

He was pleased to see Narendra; he made him sit on his cot. He went into a trance and put his leg on Narendra’s lap. Narendra forgot the outer world. He felt that he was dissolving. He shouted, ‘What’s this you are doing to me? My parents are still alive. I should go back to them.” Smilingly Sri Ramakrishna said, “Enough for today,’ and drew back his lap. Narendra became normal once again.

Apart from removing doubts from the mind of Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna won him over through his pure, unselfish love.Â  Thus began a guru-disciple relationship which is quite unique in the history of spiritual masters.Â  Narendra then became a frequent visitor to Dakshineshwar and, under the guidance of the Master, made rapid strides on the spiritual path.

Once, while Narendra was in meditation he shouted, “Where is my body?” Others had to touch his body and convince him of its existence. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this episode, he was happy that at last his desire to find a worthy disciple had been fulfilled.

After a few years two events took place, which caused Narendra considerable distress.Â  One was the sudden death of his father in 1884.Â  This left the family penniless, and Narendra had to bear the burden of supporting his mother, brothers and sisters.Â  The second event was the illness of Sri Ramakrishna which was diagnosed to be cancer of the throat.Â  In September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was moved to a house at Shyampukur, and a few months later to a rented villa at Cossipore.Â  In these two places the young disciples nursed the Master with devoted care.Â  In spite of poverty at home and inability to find a job for himself, Narendra joined the group as its leader.

After the Masterâ€™s passing, fifteen of his young disciples (one more joined them later) began to live together in a dilapidated building at Baranagar in North Kolkata.Â  Under the leadership of Narendra, they formed a new monastic brotherhood, and in 1887 they took the formal vows of sannyasa, thereby assuming new names.Â  Narendra now became Swami Vivekananda (although this name was actually assumed much later.

After establishing the new monastic order, Vivekananda heard the inner call for a greater mission in his life.Â  Vivekananda thought of the Master in relation to India and the rest of the world.Â  As the prophet of the present age, what was Sri Ramakrishnaâ€™s message to the modern world and to India in particular?Â  This question and the awareness of his own inherent powers urged Swami Vivekananda to go out alone into the wide world.Â  So in the middle of 1890, Swami Vivekananda left Baranagar Math and embarked on a long journey of exploration and discovery of India

During his travels all over India, Swami Vivekananda was deeply moved to see the appalling poverty and backwardness of the masses.Â  He was the first religious leader in India to understand and openly declare that the real cause of Indiaâ€™s downfall was the neglect of the masses.Â  The immediate need was to provide food and other bare necessities of life to the hungry millions.Â  For this they should be taught improved methods of agriculture, village industries, etc.

It was in Madras that the little lamp that appeared in Bengal’s Narendra became the blazing light of all India as Vivekananda. It was there that pressure mounted on him to go to America. The fame he won in Madras travelled to Hyderabad. Thousands gathered at the meeting addressed by him there. It was the first ever public meeting addressed by Swami Vivekananda.

It was when these ideas were taking shape in his mind in the course of his wanderings that Swami Vivekananda heard about the Worldâ€™s Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago in 1893.Â  His friends and admirers in India wanted him to attend the Parliament.Â  He too felt that the Parliament would provide the right forum to present his Masterâ€™s message to the world, and so he decided to go to America. Another reason which prompted Swami Vivekananda to go to America was to seek financial help for his project of uplifting the masses.

Swami Vivekananda, however, wanted to have an inner certitude and divine call regarding his mission.Â  Both of these he got while he sat in deep meditation on the rock-island at Kanyakumari.Â  With the funds partly collected by his Chennai disciples and partly provided by the Raja of Khetri, Swami Vivekananda left for America from Mumbai on 31 May 1893.

Thunderous Response

The conference started on 11th September, 1893. Thousands of delegates belonging to different countries of the world had gathered at the conference. Vivekananda was the youngest of them all. When it was his turn to speak, his heart was pounding. His throat went dry. Besides, he did not have, like the other delegates, a prepared speech. He requested the President to let him be the last speaker, His turn did come as the last speaker, He prayed fervently to Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Sharadadevi, and stood up to speak.

When he began his address in his pleasing voice with the words “Brothers and Sisters of America,” there was a thunderous applause; it lasted for a full three minutes. When it subsided at last he continued his short speech. He said that people born in different religions finally reach the same God, as rivers born in different places finally reach the sea. He emphatically declared that no religion is superior and none is inferior. The delegates, every one of them, praised his speech. Newspapers carried his photographs and his speech. In later days people flocked chiefly to listen to his speech. He became the darling of the crowds. Whenever he rose to speak there was deafening applause.

Till then Americans had the impression that Indians were superstitious and ignorant. Thanks to Swami Vivekananda’s persistent efforts, India was elevated to an honored position not only in America, but in the entire comity of progressive nations.

In his own motherland Vivekananda is regarded as the patriot saint of modern India and an inspirer of her dormant national consciousness. To the Hindus he preached the ideal of a strength-giving and man-making religion. Service to man as the visible manifestation of the Godhead was the special form of worship he advocated for the Indians, devoted as they were to the rituals and myths of their ancient faith. Many political leaders of India have publicly acknowledged their indebtedness to Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda’s Contribution to Hinduism is awe-inspiring.Â  Identity, it was Swami Vivekananda who gave to Hinduism as a whole a clear-cut identity, a distinct profile.Â  Before Swami Vivekananda came Hinduism was a loose confederation of many different sects.Â  Swami Vivekananda was the first religious leader to speak about the common bases of Hinduism and the common ground of all sects.Â  He was the first person, as guided by his Master Sri Ramakrishna, to accept all Hindu doctrines and the views of all Hindu philosophers and sects as different aspects of one total view of Reality and way of life known as Hinduism.Â  Speaking about Swami Vivekanandaâ€™s role in giving Hinduism its distinct identity, Sister Nivedita wrote: â€œâ€¦ it may be said that when he began to speak it was of â€˜the religious ideas of the Hindusâ€™, but when he ended, Hinduism had been created.â€

Unification, before Swami Vivekananda came, there was a lot of quarrel and competition among the various sects of Hinduism.Â  Similarly, the protagonists of different systems and schools of philosophy were claiming their views to be the only true and valid ones.Â  By applying Sri Ramakrishnaâ€™s doctrine of Harmony (Samanvaya) Swami Vivekananda brought about an overall unification of Hinduism on the basis of the principle of unity in diversity.Â  Speaking about Swami Vivekanandaâ€™s role in this field K M Pannikar, the eminent historian and diplomat, wrote: â€œThis new Shankaracharya may well be claimed to be a unifier of Hindu ideology.â€

Defence, another important service rendered by Swami Vivekananda was to raise his voice in defence of Hinduism.Â  In fact, this was one of the main types of work he did in the West.Â  Christian missionary propaganda had given a wrong understanding of Hinduism and India in Western minds.Â  Swami Vivekananda had to face a lot of opposition in his attempts to defend Hinduism.

Meeting the Challenges, at the end of the 19th century, India in general, and Hinduism in particular, faced grave challenges from Western materialistic life, the ideas of Western free society, and the proselytizing activities of Christians.Â Â  Vivekananda met these challenges by integrating the best elements of Western culture in Hindu culture.

New Ideal of Monasticism, another major contribution of Vivekananda to Hinduism is the rejuvenation and modernization of monasticism.Â  In this new monastic ideal, followed in the Ramakrishna Order, the ancient principles of renunciation and God realization are combined with service to God in man (Shiva jnane jiva seva).Â  Vivekananda elevated social service to the status of divine service.

Refurbishing of Hindu Philosophy and Religious Doctrines, Vivekananda did not merely interpret ancient Hindu scriptures and philosophical ideas in terms of modern thought.Â  He also added several illuminating original concepts based on his own transcendental experiences and vision of the future.Â  This, however, needs a detailed study of Hindu philosophy which cannot be attempted here.

These, then, the Guru, and the MotherÂ­land â€” are the two notes that mingle themselves to form the music of the works of Vivekananda. These are the treasure which it is his to offer. These furnish him with the ingredients whereof he compounds the world’s heal-all of his spiritual bounty. These are the two lights burning within that single lamp which India by his hand lighted and set up, for the guidance of her own children and of the world in the few years of work.Â  And some of us there are, who, for the sake of that lighting, and of this record that he has left behind him, bless the land that bore him and the hands of those who sent him forth, and believe that not even yet has it been given to us to understand the vastness and significance of the message that he spoke.

SELECTED TEACHINGS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:

My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet.

So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them.

Whatever you think, that you will be.Â  If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be.

If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, â€¦ and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.

Strength, strength it is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery.

The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new Gospel.

Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, love.

Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.

Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.

Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call uon 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.

They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

This is the gist of all worship â€“ to be pure and to do good to others.

It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe.