

# Peace Education— Swami Vivekananda's Worldview

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In a world that is torn asunder by strife and conflict, peace is the healing balm that every human being is seeking with tearful eyes and an anguished heart. 'Peace, O Peace' is the song of the soul everywhere—East or West, North or South. Terror-stricken and panic-driven, the human heart throbbing in any part of the globe cries for peace and tranquillity, harmony and concord.

This beautiful earth, the sun, the moon and the stars display remarkable harmony and beauty. The scientists from time immemorial have been trying to probe into these awe-inspiring patterns of symmetry and harmony, of beauty and sublimity. The utter sense of wonder that this investigation evokes in their hearts and minds has driven them to 'stand and stare' in mute awe before the infinite majesty of Nature. The symmetry and beauty hidden in the depths of the atoms, the nuclei and the elementary particles of the microcosm on the one hand, and the vast, mind-boggling majesty of the suns, moons, stars and nebulae of the macrocosm on the other, lift the human mind to a world altogether different from the one that selfish human beings have created on this beautiful earth. The pursuit of science then reaches its pinnacle.

At its dizzy heights, pursuit of physical science no longer remains a materialistic endeavour, but fades into mystic metaphysical realization. Human being feels so small, human intellect finds itself so

inadequate to fathom the depths of the cosmic mystery, be it at the micro-level or the macro. This has been the experience of all the great scientists the world has seen. The words of Newton and Einstein are well known. Newton said: 'I seem to myself like a child, playing on the seashore, picking up a pebble here and there, while the vast ocean of Truth lies undiscovered before me.' And Einstein said: 'One of the greatest emotions the human mind could feel is the sensation of the mystical. It is truly the tower of all science. He who can no longer wonder and stand in rapt awe at the cosmic mystery is as good as dead. To know what is Impenetrable really exists, manifesting Itself as the highest Wisdom and the most radiant Beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive form, is the centre of scientific pursuit. This *cosmic religious consciousness* is truly the mainspring of all scientific research.'

What is this 'religious' consciousness that Einstein is referring to? Is it anachronistic or antagonistic to scientific temper? The answer could be found in Einstein's own words: 'My religion consists of a humble adoration of an Illimitable Intelligence, which our dull minds can comprehend only in the most primitive terms.'

## Taste of Cosmic Existence

Peace comes only when the human mind can get some taste of this Cosmic Existence

‘that is manifesting Itself as the highest Wisdom and the most radiant Beauty’. To be ‘in tune with Infinity’, to be able to lose oneself in the Vast and Unfathomable, to be able to dissipate one’s little ego, and merge one’s relative existence in the Absolute is the only way to peace, the ‘Peace that passeth understanding’ in the words of Jesus Christ. When the human mind can ‘wonder and stand in rapt awe’ it feels enveloped by peace and blessedness. It perceives peace everywhere—in the sky, in the inter-space, in the earth, in the waters, in the plants and herbs, in all the human and sub-human species. It would appear that the entire universe is saturated, is soaked in supreme peace.

The Upanishadic *shānti mantras* or Peace Chants, as they are called, repeat the word *shānti* three times at the end of each mantra. Shankarāchārya, the great commentator (*bhāshyakāra*), commenting on the significance of such utterance of *shānti* thrice, says that this is to ward off or remove the three kinds of *dukkha* or sorrow that lead to *ashānti* or lack of peace. Interestingly, peace is directly related to happiness. As the *Bhagavadgītā* puts it, ‘there is happiness for one who has no peace’—*ashāntasya kutah sukham* (2.66). The three kinds of sorrow are: one, distress arising from beings around us like animals, insects, even human beings, etc, two, sorrow coming from one’s own body-mind complex, three, misery coming from natural calamities. Rishis who felt awakened in them in full measure the ‘cosmic mystical consciousness’ that Einstein speaks of, therefore sang in a mood of overflowing peace and joy: *Dyoush shāntih, antariksham shāntih, prithvi shāntih, āpah shāntih, oshadhayah shāntih, visve devāh shāntih, sarvam shāntih, shantireva shāntih*. There cannot be joy without peace. The *Bhagavadgītā* interrogates: *Ashāntasya*

*kutah sukham*—‘where is joy for one without peace?’ All-pervading peace and joy, palpably perceived as vibrant, living objects, were called *madhu*—literally, *amrita* or ‘nectar’—by the *rishis*. The famous Peace Chant that these seers sang describes their experience of seeing everything in Nature as saturated and soaked in Bliss and Joy: *Madhu vātā ritāyate, madhu ksharanti sindhavah; madhveernah santvoshadhih; madhu naktamutoshaso, madhumat pārthivam rajah; madhu dyourastu nah pitā; madhumānno vanaspatirmadhumām astu suryah; mādhvēergāvo bhavantu nah; Om shāntih, shāntih, shāntih*—‘May the winds be blissful; may the rivers overflow with bliss; may the trees and plants be filled with bliss; may the night and the day be blissful; may the earth be full of bliss; may the sky, protecting us like a kind father, shower bliss upon us; may the herbs be blissful; may the sun irradiate us with bliss; may the cows pour bliss on us. Om Peace, Peace, Peace.’

Such were the great sentiments and feelings expressed by our ancient *rishis*, as well as the modern *rishi*-scientists like Newton and Einstein. In the endless list of *rishis*, Swami Vivekananda is the latest and one of the most radiant apostles of peace. He emphasized education as one of the powerful means by which to inculcate higher values in the human mind, of which peace and harmony occupied the foremost place. By education Swami Vivekananda did not mean, as he himself said, ‘the amount of information put in the brain and runs riot there undigested all life’, but ‘man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas’. According to him, ‘education is the manifestation of Perfection already in man’.

Education orients the human mind to live in tune with the Infinite, to live in harmony and peace with all. In modern times, peace education has become an

important subject in educational institutions as peace is a state of the human mind that could be cultivated through right type of education. Indian thinkers on education like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita have emphasized education as a tool for individual and collective transformation by cultivating higher sensibilities and living in tune with the Infinite in peace and harmony. Swamiji himself was the veritable embodiment of harmony, cast as he was in the mould of his Master Sri Ramakrishna. In the memorable words of Romain Rolland, 'In the two words, *equilibrium* and *synthesis*, the whole of Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. . . . He was the embodiment of the harmony of all human energy.' He has also been described as a 'man without frontiers'. No narrowness of any sort, no bigotry, no mean fanaticism, no one-sidedness, no unreasonable clinging to one's own thought to the exclusion of others' views, no negative exclusivist attitude, but all-positive, all-embracing, all-inclusive, infinitely open heart and mind—this sums up Vivekananda's worldview. In his world, 'no one is a stranger; all are his own', as Sri Sarada Devi pointed out. War begins within the human mind that is filled with hatred. Hatred arises from narrow bigotry—from the feeling that 'I alone am right; others are all wrong'. Narrowness arises from lack of expansion of the mind and heart beyond one's own self. Lack of expansion is another name for contraction. 'All expansion is life; all contraction is death. All love is expansion and hatred, contraction. Love, therefore, is the only law of life,' said Vivekananda. Contraction comes when one is self-seeking and self-centred. Thus, non-self-consciousness or absolute selflessness is the very essence of life and existence. In fact, *a la* Buddha, Swami Vivekananda

boldly proclaimed: 'Unselfishness is God.'

Thus, world peace emanates from the hearts of a few absolutely selfless individuals—those who *just do not want* anything for themselves. In Vivekananda's words: 'Give, give; give away everything you have. Give help, give service, give love, give away all that you possess. But beware, do not seek anything in return.' 'You are the heir to the Infinite. In your heart resides the ocean of pure, selfless love. Give, give away; do not seek anything in return. If ever you seek any return, the infinite ocean in your heart would get reduced to a mere drop.' 'Man wants to hold with clenched fists; but Nature puts her hands upon his throat and make his fists open. So, give gladly; give willingly.' Swami Vivekananda's talks and writings abound with such passages, whose central message is infinite expansion of one's heart, mind and consciousness, to be able to embrace the whole universe, all of creation, in a profound feeling of undying love.

Why is it that we are unable to practise this simple truth, knowing full well, though, that this practice is the *only* way to peace and blessedness? Swamiji told a simple beautiful story in one of the sessions of the famous Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893. There was a small little frog which lived in a small well. This well was all that it knew and its little world consisted of this well alone. One day it suddenly saw another big frog falling into the well. The small frog asked the bigger one coming from outside: 'Where do you come from?' 'From the sea' was the reply. 'From the sea? What is that, by the way?' asked the small frog. The bigger one laughed aloud and said, 'How can I make you understand, confined as you are in this narrow little well for life, about what the sea is?' The small frog then leaped from one side of the well to the other, and then asked: 'Well, is your sea as big as

that?’ The sea frog laughed louder and said, ‘O what conception can you form of the sea from here?’ Then the small frog took another leap end to end and asked with a touch of irritation: ‘Now tell me, is the sea as big as that?’ The sea frog shook its head and brushed aside the question. ‘You can form no idea of the sea by being confined in this little narrow well for life. Come out and see for yourself what the sea is. I would take you there’. Then the small frog was irritated and angry beyond measure. It cried aloud, ‘This fellow is a liar. There cannot be anything bigger than my little well, where I have been living all life long. Turn this liar away or kill him.’ Swami Vivekananda added: We are all like this little frog. We live in our own narrow little wells and think that this is all the world. If anybody tells us that the world is much bigger, much richer, much more bountiful than we can ever conceive of in our own little well, we try to hate that person, consider him a stranger and fanatically try to push him away and even kill him. All the hatred and peacelessness in the world is on account of this ‘frog-in-the-well’ attitude.

Disharmony, tension and war are the inevitable result of this ‘frog-in-the-well’ psychology, while harmony, tranquillity and peace would flow naturally from the renunciation of this narrow ‘frog-in-the-well’ outlook. After all, peace and war arise from mental attitudes of individuals who represent nations and countries. Pious wishes and lip service to peace resolutions cannot take us far unless we are *psychologically committed* to this broadening of outlook, unless we develop an ever-expanding heart that is a continuous spring of an all-embracing current of love.

Swami Vivekananda’s peace mission on earth is a direct and inevitable consequence of his global vision, universal outlook and

all-embracing love. Apart from the psychological aspect discussed above, there is a distinct and unique philosophical side of his global vision that is rational, scientific and based on certain fundamental universal principles. Unless we have some conception of this wonderful worldview—*Weltanschauung*—we can hardly catch a glimpse of the mind and heart of this World Teacher, this great Apostle of Peace. We have discussed this global vision of Vivekananda elsewhere in detail and would therefore only mention that the scientific principle of microcosm-macrocosm identity is the basis of this worldview. The philosophical and rational side of this new *Weltanschauung* is complementary to the psychological and emotional aspect.<sup>1</sup>

#### Vivekananda’s concept of peace

Swamiji’s concept of peace is not the calm of the desert or the chilling silence of the cremation ground. It has a vibrant quality; it is an ocean-like state of consciousness in which there is an incessant activity on the surface but unruffled peace in the deep recesses. This kind of peace is *not* the opposite of turmoil, but is something that transcends, and therefore subsumes, both the calm and the ruffle. It is a state of heightened awareness in which all the apparent contradictions of life—the ‘pairs of opposites’, *dvanda*-s as Vedanta would call them—meet and lose their ‘contradictoriness’. It is thus a state of equilibrium, of balance, of harmony and synthesis. But this equilibrium is not a static equilibrium where all activity ceases, but a *dynamic* equilibrium wherein there is incessant, self-smashing activity poised in an Eternal Rest. It is a state of the mind lapsing into an Eternal Void—or Infinity, to put it positively—where staticism and dynamism become inseparable and indistinguishable.

Swami Vivekananda's famous poem *Peace*<sup>2</sup> puts forth these ideas eloquently.

To be able to feel and enjoy the kind of Peace envisaged by Swamiji in the poem, one's heart and mind need to be emptied of all selfish emotions. The citadel of Peace would have to be built with the ashes of the burnt desires and on the bedrock foundation of absolute void of self. 'The Peace that passeth understanding' can come only when all egoistic projections have ceased forever and the soul is bathed in an ethereal light born of dethroning of the 'puny ego' from the kingdom that belongs to the Supreme Reality.

On the darker side of the picture, by the same logic, any disturbance, any turmoil, any impediment to world peace has come from men whose hearts and minds were the throne of the 'puny ego' as the absolute monarch—selfish, self-seeking and self-centred, these men knew nothing but their own self interest. When these men become—alas for the world—leaders of a society or a nation, there are wars and conflicts and dissensions galore. History is a silent witness to this terrible truth. Self-centredness breeds non-accommodation of others and their views, intolerance, hatred, cruelty and war. To be able to come out of one's own self, with its accretions of prejudices and opinions tinged with one's own bias, and look at reality from a non-self perspective is to operate from a deep inner

Void that contains, as it were, the whole universe within It. It is this 'Void', which is perpetually getting filled up to overflowing when the personality's—the ego's—emptying is complete, that Buddha called *Nirvāna*, Nāgārjuna called *Shunya*, Shankara called *Purna*, Christ called *the Kingdom of Heaven*, Upanishads called *Advaita-jnāna*, Chaitanya called *Parama-prema (Supreme Love)* and so on. It is this self-emptiness that Swami Vivekananda preached at the Chicago Parliament of Religions more than a century ago, when he proclaimed, 'Help and not fight; assimilation and not destruction; harmony and peace and not dissension'.

Now that man is most panic-stricken, insecure and fear-ridden, he is most likely to open not only his ears but his heart to the Music of the Spheres, the Divine Music that perpetually rise in this Kingdom of Heaven within. 'Blessed are the peace makers' proclaimed Jesus the Christ. Blessed indeed are those who help broadcast and transmit this Music. Blessed again are those who awaken humankind into listening to Its enchanting notes. Blessed, thrice blessed, are those rare souls, those Messengers of Light and Peace like Swami Vivekananda, who not only awaken but also fill the soul of humankind with the waves of Cosmic Rhythm (*ritam brihat*) that rise naturally and spontaneously in the ocean of Universal Consciousness. ■

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Interested reader may refer to the detailed article by the author: 'Swami Vivekananda's Global Vision—the Microcosm-Macrocosm Identity', published in the book *Swami*

*Vivekananda—His Global Vision*, edited by Shanti Nath Chattopadhyay, published by Punthi Pustak, Calcutta (2001).

2 *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 395-396.

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