Relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings

for young people in Japan

Respected Swami Medhasananda, Honourable Sri Aseem Mahajan, Mr. J. S. Dayal, ladies and gentlemen, I am very honoured and extremely happy to be invited to speak on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

I am a university teacher in my social role, but at heart I am a simple *sadhak* and *sevak*. I met my Guru in Puri, India in 1991 and since then the whole aim of my life has been to follow the path shown by my Guru. The writings of Swami Vivekananda have always been an important source of inspiration and encouragement for me as a *sadhak* and *sevak* in my humble pursuit of spirituality.

Today, I would like to speak on the problems faced by young people in Japan and how Swami Vivekananda’s teachings can inspire them to solve these problems, as kindly suggested by respected Swami Medhasananda.

So, what kind of problems are the young people in Japan facing? People in their late teens and early twenties in Japan are sometimes referred to as the “*satori* generation”. “*Satori*” means enlightenment in Japanese. Are they spiritually enlightened? Of course, not. The word *satori* is used here sarcastically. They were born into a rich and mature society after Japan reached the zenith of its economic development. They grew up in the period called “the lost two decades” when there was economic stagnation in Japan. Are they unhappy? This does not appear to be the case. Let me quote some statistics in my role as a social scientist..

According to a public opinion survey concerning people's lifestyles conducted by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government, 70.5% of the people in their twenties are satisfied with their present life. The rates of satisfaction are lower in those in their forties and fifties: 58.2％ and 55.3％ respectively. In the late 1960s, the satisfaction rate of people in their twenties was around 60%, and in the 1970s, only around 50%. So, today’s young people in their twenties have the highest satisfaction rate in many decades. They are content with what they already have—mobile phones, iPad, Wii, and all other little gadgets. They are not interested in high-level consumption or travelling abroad. They are realistic about their future and have no great ambitions or dreams. Because they see no better future, they are satisfied with their present life. It is as if they are contented with themselves, and hence the term, “satori generation”. But are they really at peace? This does not seem to be the case. In the same survey, as many as 63.1% of those in their twenties answered that they have worries and anxieties in 2010, whereas the number was less than 40% in the late 1980s. It seems that the young people in their twenties in Japan are content with their present life, but have not much hope for the future; they, instead, have worries and anxieties. This is far from an ideal situation. What do they lack? Is it only because of the continued economic stagnation that they have worries? Will they discard all their anxieties and attain a real *satori* state, if Abenomics succeed? I don’t think so.

It seems to me that the young people in Japan lack an ideal for which they can dedicate their lives. Because there is no such ideal, or a higher aim in life, the young people try to cling on to what they already have inside their little cocoons. They are afraid of the future and of breaking their little self.

What does Swami Vivekananda say? He says, “Stand up, men and women, in this spirit, dare to believe in the Truth, dare to practice the Truth.” “Fill the brain with high thoughts, highest ideals, place them day and night before you, and out of that will come great work.” He says that “we have hypnotized ourselves into this thought that we are little, that we are born, and that we are going to die, and into a constant state of fear”.

We must cast off our attachment to this little self, this little cocoon in which we seek our little pleasure. Actually, it is not only about the young people. It is about you and me. It is about everyone who is bound. We have our worries and anxieties because we are attached to the small physical comforts of this little self, forgetting about the higher ideal, about the Truth, about the Spirit which is our real essence. We are that Spirit, which is Existence itself, Consciousness itself, and Bliss itself: *Sat Chit Ananda*. There is nothing lacking in us. We, in our essence, are the Spirit or *Atman* which is all-pervading, eternal and complete. *Purnamadah Purnamidam, Purnat Purnamudachyate, Purnasya Purnamadaya, Purnameva Vashishyate:*this is a verse from the *Isha Upanishad* which means “That is full; this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness. We are that fullness, infinite and eternal. And yet we fear lest we should lose our small physical comfort, being attached to this small self. What fools we are!

Let me tell you the story about a sheep-lion, recounted by Swami Vivekananda. You may have heard this story before. But this is my favourite story, and I beg your pardon for my indulgence in narrating it to you.

A lioness, which had a baby in its womb, was going about in search of prey; seeing a flock of sheep, she jumped upon them. She died in the effort, and a baby lion was born, motherless. It was taken care of by the sheep, which brought it up. It grew up with them, ate grass, and bleated like the sheep. How did it bleat? Like the sheep: “Mee, mee (I, I)”. It forgot its own identity and believed it was this little self. One day, another lion came in search of prey and was astonished to find that in the midst of this flock of sheep was a lion, fleeing like the sheep at the approach of danger. He tried to get near the sheep-lion, to tell it that it was not a sheep but a lion, but the poor animal fled at his approach. However, he waited for an opportunity and one day found the sheep­lion sleeping. He approached him and said, "You are a lion." "I am a sheep," cried the sheep-lion and, unable to believe the contrary, bleated: “Mee, mee (I, I)”, still clinging onto the false self. The lion dragged the sheep-lion towards a lake and said, "Look here, here is my reflection and yours." Then came the comparison. The sheep-lion looked at the lion and then at its own reflection, and suddenly it dawned upon him that he was also a lion. At last, the sheep-lion roared, the bleating was gone. How does a lion roar? AUM! That is the sound of the eternal Brahman. Instead of “mee, mee (I, I)”, came the “AUM”—realisation of the true Self, Infinite and Eternal. We are the lion. We are souls, pure, infinite, and perfect.

By the way, at the gates of Japanese shrines and temples, you will see two lions (*sinhas*) or *komainu*. The lion on the left has its mouth open, roaring “A”, while the one on the right has its mouth shut, representing “UM”. Together they are roaring AUM, reminding us of the existence of Eternal Reality and who we really are. So the next time you see the two lions at the gate of a shrine or temple, you can roar AUM inside your heart, or perhaps even aloud if there is no one around!

　 We are the lion. We are *Atman* that is eternal and infinite. So let us stop weeping and bleating “mee, mee (I, I)” and, instead, roar the sound-Brahman of the eternal “AUM”, which represents our true Self. It is by discarding our little self and the comfortable cocoon in which we nested ourselves, and realising who we really are that we can become fearless. Fearlessness is given a very important place in Swami Vivekananda’s teachings. Let me quote his words: “The moment you fear, you are nobody. It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions. It is the fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven in a moment.” The sheep (our little self) is in fear of the lion (our true self) because the sheep is attached to its wrong identification with the little self. Once we know that we are the lion, *Param Atman* that is also *Param Brahman*, we can discard the little self and roar like the lion: AUM!

Discarding our little self and the comfortable cocoon, however, does not mean that we should not take care of this body. This body is a vehicle for the Spirit, and we must take care of this body and the environment surrounding us through our work as long as we are identified with this body. It is like taking care of your car. In order to reach our destination, we need this body as our vehicle. Well, to be honest, I am not very good at taking care of myself. I am what people might call “a forgetful professor”, and when I am in a thoughtful mood, I forget many things. For example, I sometimes—well, actually quite often, according to my wife—forget to lock the doors of my flat when I go out. My Guru, who is now at Her eternal abode, used to tease me, “Oh, you leave everything to God. That is why you are so worry-free!” She said these words with such sweetness that I used to feel extremely embarrassed and happy at the same time. From my gentle wife, I often get a scolding for my careless behaviour. Of course, she is right. I should lock the door when I leave the house when there is no one inside.

But I say, never lock the door of your heart. You have to always keep it open. Is there no one inside? There is the Spirit, our real Self, *Param Atman*. Our body and our heart are the abode of the divine. This body is the temple of the divine Spirit and we should take good care the temple, while keeping the door of the heart open, so that we can always be in touch with the Spirit which takes abode there, and one day know it in its fullest.

How can we open our heart and know the Spirit, our True Self? Swami Vivekananda says, “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.” He tells us that there are four ways for this: “The grandest idea in the religion of the Vedanta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths; and these paths I have generalized into four, viz, those of work, love, psychology, and knowledge. These four ways correspond to the four kinds of Yoga. Yoga means “union.” “To the worker (in Karma Yoga), it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic (in Raja Yoga), union between his lower and Higher Self; to the lover (in Bhakti Yoga), union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher (in Jnana Yoga), it is the union of all existence.”

These four ways of yoga can also be combined in practical ways. Through knowledge or Jnana Yoga, we can distinguish between the Real and unreal, and attempt to discard our attachment to the unreal little self. This process can be assisted by Bhakti Yoga that is concentrating our consciousness towards the object of Love, towards the divine. If our attention goes to the divine, naturally our attachment to the little self will wither away. On top of it, if we can do our work selflessly through Karma Yoga as service for the divine within others, that would amount to combining action, love, and knowledge together. Raja Yoga would also help you have peace of mind, and experience the divine within, if one is fortunate enough to have the proper guidance of a *Sat-Guru*.

Swami Vivekananda received the essence of the perfect combination of action, love, and knowledge from his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, as follows: “Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva”, that is, “Serving God in each living being." Here, knowledge of the immanent divinity, love of God, and working for all beings as service to God are all combined in one. This is the divine way for us living in this world to reach the highest ideal in life.

“Serving God in each living being." It is a beautiful idea, but never easy to practise. We may try to see the divine in others, but often see the demon instead, and feel angry and dejected. In such cases, we are only seeing the reflection of the demon within us. Don’t be discouraged. This is a part of the cleansing process. In the gradual process, the more you see the divine in others, the more you will see the divine within you. Practicing *sadhana* and *seva* is not easy. As the years go by, as a disciple, I increasingly realise the mysterious depth of yoga, *sadhana* and *seva.*.

It is time for wrapping up. How are Swami Vivekananda’s teachings relevant for young people in Japan? Swami Vivekananda tells us to discard the attachment to the little self. When we stand up to live for an ideal, we will be fearless. When we are fearless, we will not be hiding in a small cocoon of false *satori* any more, but will roar as a lion: AUM! Swami Vivekananda says, “Live for an ideal, and leave no place in the mind for anything else.” And, “See for the highest, aim at that highest, and you shall reach the highest.”

With our humble effort, and the grace of Guru and God, may we always think, see and aim only at the highest. Let there not be any room left for anything else. May the youth find and strive for the ideal. The future of our world lies with them. May Swami Vivekananda bless our souls so that, one day, we may reach the highest ideal.