

## **Be Proud Like Them**

When Swami Vivekananda advised us to be proud, he did not want us to be haughty, arrogant or boastful, of course, but to have a deep sense of dignity and self-respect. We have to do away with vanity, but we must be proud of our human birth, our national identity, our respectable ancestors, elders and friends. Such pride is a source of positive energy. Swami Vivekananda was always full of positive energy and he called upon the youths not to touch even with their toes anything that would weaken them physically, mentally or spiritually.

At the inaugural session of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he declared, 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth....' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, p.3*)

He was not only proud of the nation and of the spiritual tradition he was born in, but also of all races, all humanity, and more. He said elsewhere, 'As for us *Vedāntins* and *Sannyāsins*, we are proud of our Sanskrit-speaking ancestors of the Vedas; proud of our Tamil-speaking ancestors whose civilization is the oldest yet known; we are proud of our Kolarian ancestors older than either of the above — who lived and hunted in forests; we are proud of our ancestors with flint implements — the first of the human race; and if evolution is true, we are proud of our animal ancestors, for they antedated man himself. We are proud that we are descendants of the whole universe, sentient or insentient. Proud that we are born, and work, and suffer — prouder still that we die when the task is finished and enter forever the realm where there is no more delusion.' (*CW, Vol. 4, p.302*)

Such respectful attitude develops in us seriousness and a deep sense of dignity. It expands our narrow perspectives of life into infinitely broad ones. It results in a firm faith in and an unwavering focus on our own worth and our potentials, which is called *ātma-shraddhā*. Swamiji held that the root cause of India's downfall was the loss of this *shraddhā*. He was very fond of the story of Nachiketa, a boy of twelve, who could unravel the mystery of death with a superb sense of self-worth.

Sri Ramakrishna possessed tremendous self-respect even at a very early age. That is why he could think and act so freely, confidently, and rightly. None could stop him from taking the first alms during his *Upanayana* (Brahmin's sacred thread ceremony) from Dhani, a widow of a so-called low caste. He was sent to a *Pāthshālā* (the village school) in his childhood for traditional elementary education. However, in his early youth itself, he rejected traditional education as being merely for bread earning, and not for attaining higher ideals of life.

He strove hard to realize the Ultimate Truth, which alone can solve all problems of life. He declared, like all men of realization, that It is already within us, beyond the body and the mind, as the source of consciousness, boundless love, and infinite power. We are all one, because the same Truth is within us. Therefore, 'they alone live, who live for others.' On the propagation and practical application of this truth depends the future of mankind. So, he needed a group of young men, who would themselves realize the ideal and dedicate their life for this mission. And they came. They were a group of proud and brave youths. After the passing away of the Master, they took up the mission on the face of abject poverty, indifference, ridicule, and even active opposition. Nothing could diminish their morale. They prepared themselves through austerity, with Narendra (Vivekananda) as their leader, to burst

upon the society like a bombshell. They had the courage to claim that, in due course of time, society would have to follow them like an obedient dog. They placed the ideal before the world as a bulwark against the terrible onslaught of rank materialism and consumerism. And, for them, spirituality was not in mystery mongering, but in character and Manhood.

Swamiji roused the mummified nation, suffering from severe inferiority complex, with the message of manliness. All power is within you, he said. He based his teachings on the eternal message of India, and taught Indians not just to be proud of it, but to implement it in the everyday life of even the poorest and the meanest. He repeatedly said, ‘Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. If there is sin, this is the only sin — to say that you are weak, or others are weak.’ (*CW, Vol. 2, p.308*) In a letter he wrote: ‘*Kshināh sma dināh sakarunā jalpanti mudhā janāh*’ (*CW, Vol. 6, p.275*) – only the self-hypnotized fools think that they are frail and weak! He wanted all to be, to use the words of Tagore, ‘Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.’

A handful of Indian youths listened to Swamiji’s clarion call and sacrificed their life for the country’s independence from the foreign yoke. But, only political freedom is not enough. For the emancipation of the masses, hundreds and thousands of such men and women are necessary. He knew that ‘they will come’. They must come and rouse national self-confidence. They must work hard to give back to the masses their *lost individuality*. As the Americans say, ‘Yes, we can’, so we must also stand up as one nation and prove our worth. We shall no more be looked down upon by the world as a corrupt, poor, and quarrelling nation.

Let us recite with Swamiji, ‘Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, “I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.”’ (*CW, Vol. 4, p.480*) With this spirit and this feeling, we can change our destiny and the destiny of our nation. The Mahamandal is trying to work in its small way to this end: to instill this spirit into the younger generation of the country.