

Know Vivekananda

Rabindranath Tagore once said to a foreign dignitary, ‘If you want to know India, study Vivekananda.’ With a little amendment for you, young men of India, we say, ‘If you want to build your life and rebuild India, know Vivekananda.’

One of the most interesting things about Vivekananda is that he never asks you to believe in anything, even in his words. He taught free thinking and practised it. He did not preach any dogma, but searched after truth with an open mind.

From him you get the gist of all you need to know for a positive and meaningful life. You get clear and fundamental concepts of education, religion, science, history, democracy, citizenship, and so on and so forth. He was far ahead of his times and his observations are still being validated by new discoveries in fields as diverse as modern physics, history, and even neuroscience. But, above all, you get the exact *why and how of life building as well as of nation building*, that you seldom get anywhere else. You will get the touch of an oceanic heart, without a parallel in known history of mankind, which embraces all humanity without distinction and feels so intensely for their sufferings. You will come in touch with a perfect, fully developed MAN, who might be the ideal of young men of the modern age. You will be thrilled to see a harbinger of Strength rousing youths from slumber. To know him you need not read every page of his Works, but to *closely interact with his life and ideas*.

The naughty child that he was, born in a well-to-do family of Calcutta, he grew up with a well built physique, sharp intellect, a melodious voice, and tremendous love for purity. Narendra was a favourite among friends for his sense of humour and beautiful voice. He was a trained and accomplished singer. He was adept in physical exercises and games, including cricket. At night, when alone, he would be absorbed in deep meditation or voraciously studying serious matters. He was a brilliant student at the Presidency College and later the Scottish Church College, never taking examinations seriously. With a thoroughly scientific temperament, he seriously inquired into the meaning of life. He studied science, history, philosophy, religion, literature, and so on very deeply. A polymath in the broadest sense, he could not find the ultimate solution to the problems of life anywhere. Finally, at the age of 18, he met Sri Ramakrishna, in whom he found the highest ideal of renunciation and Love, and gradually came to realize the highest truths of life. There too he struggled for years, doubted and contradicted the Master’s teachings at every step. The Master was a free thinker *par excellence*, so he always encouraged this young man to think for himself. Some days before his passing away, Narendra reached the height of spiritual realization and could wholeheartedly accept the *Vedantic* ideas taught by the Master: *the divinity of man and oneness of all*. The Master turned his intellectual and spiritual cravings into a burning desire to lift the suffering humanity.

During this period he visited the Master occasionally, for he had to attend to his studies and other pursuits also. Just after the final results of BA Examination were out, his

father deceased and he faced for the first time direst poverty at home. He struggled hard to save his mother and younger brothers from hunger, but got no job except one for a short while. He came to see for himself the ugly face of society.

After a few years we find him treading the dusty paths of India and mixing with all, the high and the low, the scholar and the ignorant, the king and the poor, of all communities for several years – often without even a morsel of food for days – with the mission of rebuilding India. He tried to convince the high ups to start development schemes for the unnumbered millions sunk in poverty, ignorance, and social tyranny, but failed. With a burning heart he then travelled to America, *via* China and Japan, for help and not for preaching this or that religion. After the initial troubles he faced there, he suddenly became famous. Thousands thronged to listen to his liberal teachings – the eternal message of India. He started collecting funds for his Indian work, but soon came to understand that India must help herself. His work in America and England roused great enthusiasm in India. India bathed in his glory and regained her self-respect, which she was about to lose under British influence. Later he travelled in Europe and Egypt and then came back to India. He was given a triumphant hero's welcome everywhere, especially by the youths. And everywhere he called upon them to shun slave psychology, to arise and face the crisis of the country. He gave them a complete scheme for the regeneration of India. Central to the scheme was 'man-making education', for principled and selfless men alone can bring about a change.

Overworked, the lion among men was already in broken health. And, true to his words, he did not cross 40. He left his mantle to the youths of modern generations. For his followers, his watchwords were: No cowardice, no compromise, no self-seeking. Unselfishness is God. To be good and to do good – that is the whole of religion. Be and make. Let this be our motto. India must rise. Onward!