

LISTEN TO THEM

Millions of life forms are there on this beautiful earth. Each has its own beauty and importance. But man is not just one of them; he has the highest and a different kind of elegance. He can come to know great, new facts about himself, about the immense powers latent in him. He learns to manifest these powers and utilize them. Thus he becomes a different man, a real man, revealing his inner dimensions of love and purity. That is a revolutionizing process – this knowing and this becoming.

But despite much boasted progress of civilization, most of us would never get any opportunity of knowing and becoming what we could have become. We remain small, apparently dwarfed by nature that includes both our mind and the circumstances in which we live. ‘Life’, said Swami Vivekananda, ‘is the unfoldment and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down.’ But man does not learn to transcend their dwarfing influence. He remains ‘most ignorant of what he is most assured – his glazy essence’. And let us remember: ‘Unless he erects himself above himself, how poor a thing is man’.

We get enticed to so superficial and transient things of nature that we live and die like worms upon earth. Thus we lose the great opportunity that unfolds to us in the form of human life. If we strive, this human body and mind can be developed for fulfilling the great destiny of man – the blossoming of the lotus of heart that feels for all. Such growth – even a little of it – can save the individual as well as the human civilization in general in the face of the looming danger of destruction. Swami Vivekananda used to quote this from the Gita: ‘*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*’ – even a little practice of this dharma – these elevating principles of life – would save man from the great dangers of selfishness, of narrowness, of chicken-heartedness.

We talk of empowering the masses, empowering women, and so on. But we do not know what it really means. With the world-wide, shameless, and terrible massacre of culture, the commoner has been emasculated beyond recognition. It has come about with the almost universal acceptance of the market as the supreme temple where the god called capital, bestowing benevolence on just a few though, is worshipped. Real empowerment will come back to man only if he can be awakened and made to stand upon his inherent glory.

The absence of this idea in our life and thinking has led human civilization to the precipice. The current paradigm of development has, for the last few centuries, been plundering nature, devastating its ecological system to the extent of making irreparable damages, mainly to obtain excessive enjoyment for the wealthy. The posterity will in near future have to suffer immensely for that. Recently more than 2500 scientists from 130 countries under the umbrella of an intergovernmental panel of the UN on climate change have indicated that man is responsible for the intense global warming (that may lead to inundation of many countries in a matter of centuries due to rapid melting of ice sheets and glaciers). And after the Cold War is long over, are we any nearer to world peace? UNDP reports on human development glaringly depict the picture of the widening gulf between the rich and the poor, of the thousands of children ‘allowed to starve in sight of plenty’. Yet we

eulogize economic globalization and modern management techniques for optimizing profits! Even the ILO report of 2006 on 'Global Employment Trends for Youth' portrays a grim picture. Some resource-rich but poverty-stricken and exploited countries, especially in Latin America, are trying to reverse this trend which was imposed everywhere with the help of the World Bank and IMF prescriptions. But, as Swami Vivekananda observed way back in 1896 when he was in London, 'Everything goes to show that Socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, is coming on the boards. The people will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food. *What guarantee have we that this or any civilisation will last, unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man?* Depend on it, religion goes to the root of the matter. If it is right, all is right.' Here we get a clear clue to the actual meaning of 'religion' as well as the way to do any lasting good to the civilizations of the world.

In this age of profound scientific discoveries, fast changing technologies, and economic growth, we have missed the core meaning of human development, and it is such a slippage that costs millions of innocent lives, that has left billions of men in inhuman conditions – with loads of promise but no food, no medicine, no safety, no education. To arrest this trend men must be proper men first. We have, therefore, to rediscover and recapture the real stature of man and thus reverse the whole trend for the well-being of all.

This is exactly where we need Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. They came to show us how to live this life and what for, to prove and demonstrate before us what we can be and how, to invigorate and inspire us to seek the highest that all of us are destined to achieve. So, we must listen to them.

If we care to do so with an open mind, we shall be astonished. Not because of their greatness, modernity, and correctness alone, but more because of the new discoveries we shall make about ourselves. We shall wonder at our own powers and possibilities and the prospects of a new civilization, where all variety of men and their cultures can be accommodated and can develop in a vigorous harmony that rests on the unshakable foundation of oneness of all existence. We shall be energized to resolve and act.