



Swami Vivekanand's Historical Speech: Vedic Dharma; the Treasure of Spiritual, Ethical and Moral Values for Peace

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ABSTRACT

Historic speech of swami Vivekanand has been an inspirational representation of not only the Vedic religion but predominantly Indian values of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* (Entire earth is a family). It encouraged universal peace and harmony and rolling the message to masses since ages. Present article compiles the ideas of peace from the historic speech and illustrate it according to Vedic literature. In the restless world conditions and power wars, it is important for all to understand real meaning of internal (self) peace and peace for all.

Keywords: Peace, Vedic Literature

“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 religion Swami Vivekananda was speaking about is Vedic Dharma which is a treasure of spiritual, ethical and moral values that were practised and realized since ages by sages and saints and was compiled into the Vedas and Upanishads and later in many supplementary books in the form of explanations and stories as the situation and time demanded. Vedic Religion includes ritualistic, philosophical and cultural views of Vedic seers. It can be studied by understanding the deep meaning of Vedic literature. Here author is trying to give some specific principles of peace and humanity according to Vedic dharma claimed by Swamiji in its general nature. “The universal tolerance” he emphasised upon is nature of Vedic dharma.

Peace can be explained in positive terms as well. Presence of happiness, health, content and good economy, social justice, and freedom of expression; creative support for personal growth at all levels, are some of the elements of peace. Such a peace can be termed as positive peace.

All ranges of shades of meaning of peace and harmony come easily under three basic sources as visualized by Swami Vivekananda. These are inner peace, social peace and peace with nature. These can be analyzed further as under:

Inner Peace: Inner peace is peace with self – self-contentedness. One, ‘whose mind remains unperturbed amid sorrows, whose thirst for pleasure has altogether disappeared, and who is free from passion, fear and anger’ is said to have achieved inner peace. For example, harmony and peace with oneself, good health and absence of inner conflicts, joy, sense of freedom, insight, spiritual peace, feelings of kindness, compassion, and content, appreciation of art.

Social Peace: Human beings are social beings; they cannot live in isolation. The tapestry of the living community is fast changing from living in homogeneous, cultural, linguistic and religious groups to cosmopolitan community that is multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religions. For an enriched and meaningful life, it is necessary to learn to live together within diversity. Again, for social peace, tolerance for diversity is not enough; respect and love for diversity is the precondition. Social peace implies harmony in human relationships, conflict reconciliation and resolution, love, friendship, unity, mutual understanding, co-operation, brotherhood, tolerance of differences, democracy, community building, human rights, morality, etc.

Peace with Nature: Planet earth is the cradle of human civilization. Symbolically, she is the mother earth. Peace with nature implies stopping the violation of her dignity through environmental and ecological degradation, exploitation, etc. Peace with nature is harmony with natural environment and mother earth.

Peace has been defined as ‘absence of violence’. This is rather a narrow and negative definition. In accord with the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda peace should mean not only absence of war, but also violence in all forms, such as conflicts, threat to life, social degradation, discrimination, oppression, exploitation poverty, injustice, and so on. Peace cannot be built as long as violent social structures exist in society. Naturally such structures will lead people to act violently. For instance, an unfair system of resource distribution in a society would lead to frustration of those who are deprived or get less. Frustration in turn could lead people to violence. Presence of all such obstructive and indicative factors can be termed negative. Peace as ‘absence of violence’ means absence of fistfights or firing or carpet bombing or use of nuclear war heads. This is rather inadequate.

Aims of a Human Life According to the doctrines of the Vedas, life of a human being should be happy and satisfied physically, mentally and spiritually.

The great fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads is identity of - 3 - the individual Atman with the world-Atman (Brahman). It is most forcibly expressed in a frequently repeated sentence of the Chandogya Upanishad (6.8-16)- "This whole world consists of it: that is the Real, which is the Soul, that art thou, O Shvetaketu." In that famous formula "That are you" (*tat tvam asi*), all the teachings of the Upanishads are summed up. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.6) expresses the same doctrine- "Whoever knows this 'I am Brahma' (*aham Brahma asmi*), becomes the All. Even the gods are not able to prevent him from becoming it because he becomes their Self (Atman)." First mantra of Ishavasyopanishad says that the Supreme Brahman is pervaded every where *Isha vasyamidam sarvam yat kinca jadyatyam jagat | Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasya sviddhanam* || Translation - All this whatever there is changeful in this changing universe should be enveloped by the Lord. Protect the Self by this renunciation. Do not covet the wealth of anyone. (Do not covet, for whose is this wealth?) Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda (10. 90) describes Supreme Brahman or Purusha as Universal soul.

Concept of Social Unity and Welfare of All In the Rigveda-Samhita we find a unique prayer for social unity. It is called *Samjnana sukta*. The term '*Samjnana*' gives the sense of unity in thoughts. The unanimity and harmony on mental and intellectual level among the people gathered is its purpose. The devotee invokes the Lord of creation to inspire mankind with the feeling of love, and the Lord commands that all should be bound together with a common aim, common thought and common will. The verse says: *Sam gacchadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manamsi janatam | Deva bhagam yatha purve samjanana upasate* || Translation: You should move together, speak together and think together. As the ancient gods with one accord accept their sacrificial share, so your minds should be of one accord. Here 'Deva' may also mean elders of divine qualities. Just as they with full consciousness, played their part in life, so you should follow them. Another prayer from Yajurveda is worth mentioning here. It is for the feeling of Goodness among all beings. Here the term 'Bhadra' is used which means "goodness'- *Bhadram karnebhah s'unuyama devah Bhadram pas'yemakshabhir yajatrah | Sthirairangaistushtuvansas tanubhir Vyas'emahi devahitam yad ayuh* || -VA.S. 25.21 Translation: O Gods ! may we listen with our ears to what is good (Bhadram), may we see with our eyes what is good, O Gods ! Worthy of worship! may we, with firm limbs and bodies, offering praise-songs to you, enjoy the divinely ordained term of life (Ayu). The full span of life is important but more important is that it should be good and auspicious. Our life should be devoted to welfare and noble qualities. Thus Vedic religion believes in the welfare of all beings for global harmony and peace.

Peace is a state of mind. Taking a cue from Swamiji's thoughts it may be beautifully expressed as in the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution. Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed".

Violence emerges out of intolerance for differences in beliefs, views, cultures and social traditions and mores. Hence, peace is more than absence of violence; it is tolerance, understanding, and respect of differences and it is love. It is concern for others over concern for self to quote the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, again for guidance and inspiration:

“That ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and distrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all often broken into war;

That the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races;

That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all nations must be fuelling a spirit of mutual assistance and concern; and that peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”

According to Indian scriptures as pointed by Swami Vivekananda, there are three kinds of violence, namely, mental (*manasik*), verbal (*vachik*) and physical (*kayeeek*).

Mental: Thinking of hurting others, thoughts like ‘I wish I had hit him hard’ is mental violence although it was only a wish and no physical harm was actually done. Thinking ill of others is also one form of violence.

Verbal: Use of harsh words is another form of violence since it hurts others. There is an important dictum in Sanskrit, an advice by the preceptor to the disciple, ‘speak the truth, speak sweetly; do not speak the truth that’s not sweet’. This dictum is to prevent violence through speech.

Physical: Using physical force to harm others. This is the most commonly recognized form of violence between individuals, groups, communities, and countries.

Again, violence or absence of peace has several social configurations or conglomerations, namely:

- ❖ Individuals (fight between two individuals),
- ❖ Groups (clashes of gangs),
- ❖ Communities (caste conflicts and communal violence),
- ❖ Nations (war between two countries),
- ❖ Cultures (world wars and contemporary Anglo-American war in Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.)

As the conflicts are scaled up from individual to cultures, destructions are also scaled up in sync with long-term impact and implications.

Compared to the definition of peace as absence of violence, it may be worthwhile to look into the concept of the philosophy of Sri Swami Vivekananda, which is based on Vedantic tradition. According to Swamiji dependable and solid foundation of peace is contentedness.

Conventionally, contentedness has been taken as satisfaction of desires. But this is like a mirage in the desert. Desire is an endless process; satisfaction of every desire leads to another desire of higher order rather than to contentedness. A poor person aspires to have only a bicycle. Once she/he buys a bicycle, he/she feels satisfied; but in no time she/he watches others travelling on a scooter; then she/he also wants to have a scooter. And this goes on and on. Lack of success in satisfying the material desires leads to anger, the seed of all violence - mental, verbal and physical, Compared to that, from the angle of peace, contentedness means control on desires. If the desire is under control, failure that leads to anger is removed. It is worth recollecting a dictum from Bhagavat Gita, which Swamiji used to quote very often 'Human right is only to that much that is necessary to fill the stomach; anyone who wants more is a thief, deserves punishment'. One who is contented will not want more and to qualify to be called a thief inviting punishment and hence violence. The concept is beautifully illustrated by Acharya Vinob Bhave taking a cue from Swami Vivekananda. He used three words to explain this concept of contentedness. These are:

- ❖ *Prakriti* - One who eats when hungry; it is natural and normal.
- ❖ *Vikriti* - One who eats even though his stomach is full and is not hungry. This is human deformity and degradation.
- ❖ *Sanskriti* - One who gives away his/her own food to another hungry person, keeping his/her own hunger in abeyance; this is culturedness.

Peace can be cultivated, hence, only through training of the mind to control the desire, balancing between deserving and desiring, developing tolerance and respect for differences, concern and love for others, and moving from competition to cooperation. Peace can be installed through education in cooperation and mutual support, deep-seated concern for others over concern for self. This implies a training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful.

Swami Vivekananda's thought on this point may be epitomized as follows:

"Peace is the behaviour that encourages harmony in the way people talk, listen, and interact with each other and discourages actions to hurt, harm, or destroy each other."

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