

**Swami Vivekananda Birth Anniversary
50th Inter-School Elocution Competition
2023**

ENGLISH



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

12th Road, Khar (W), Mumbai - 400052

Tel. : 61818000 / 61818002

For Juniors (Std. V to VII)

Note :

1. Time Allotted: 3 minutes.
2. Please confine to the given text.
3. Evaluation by the judges:
(a) Content : 30 marks. (b) Clarity: 10 marks. (c) Impact: 10 marks.

NAREN'S SPIRITUAL INCLINATION

There is a saying, morning shows the day. Likewise by observing the sum total of qualities manifested in a child one can have a preview of the life that is yet to be. About Naren one can say that the morning of his life was auspicious indeed! With his well-shaped graceful form, fair complexion, large bright eyes, and face bearing the impress of budding genius, he naturally attracted everyone's love. His mind filled with a hundred soaring visions, heart soaked in affection, intellect razor-sharp, courage boundless, inventive genius astounding, working capacity unreckoned, and enthusiasm irrepressible - Naren was peerless even from childhood. Above all was his spontaneous inclination towards God. From his very childhood he was an adept in meditation, and had delight in worship, prayer and search for God.

Naren, the future Swami Vivekananda was born on Monday, January 12, 1863. It was Makara Sankranti day - a great Hindu festival. The millions of men and women who were observing the festival unknowingly greeted the new-born babe with prayers and worship. They little knew that he had just been born, who was to usher in a new age of glory for his country, who was to reorganize the spiritual and national consciousness of India, and who was to become a great apostle - preaching unto the world the gospel of redemption, namely the message of Vedanta.

When the time came for a name to be given to the infant, there was much discussion. When they asked the mother, she looked into the depths of the child's eyes, as if she would see

into his very soul. There was a strange stillness for some moments; then she turned to them and with much feeling said: "Let his name be Vireshwar! So shall he be called." Those who heard this were satisfied. They called him Bileh for short. Later he came to be called Narendranath or Naren.

As Bhuvaneshwari would gaze unblinking at the face of the lovely, healthy babe in her lap, her heart would fill with pride and she would shed tears of joy; for she at last held in her arms her much-longed-for darling of many prayers. But this was no ordinary babe, in him was hidden a tremendous power, and she was faced with the difficult problem of containing his irrepressible restlessness. He was hardly three, but already complaints against him for breach of peace were mounting.

Narendranath was a naughty child, subject to fits of restlessness during which he was beyond control. At such times he would wear the family out. Bribes, threats, everything was tried nothing was of any avail. Finally, Bhuvaneshwari found that if she poured cold water on the head of the screaming child, chanting the name of Shiva in his ears at the same time, or if she threatened him with "Shiva will not let you go to Kailas if you do not behave", he would calm down and become his eager, joyous self again. It was after such scenes that the mother used to say, "I prayed to Shiva for a son and He has sent me one of His demons!" But aside from these outbursts, he was a sweet and loving child.

The first seed of spiritual life was sown during the period of Naren's early education. Again and again he had heard of Rama and Sita. He had listened enrapt to readings from the Ramayana, and had followed the long story of Rama's struggle and conquest with all the thrill of personal romantic adventure. He had, as well, observed the elder members of the family sitting in worship and meditation, and it occurred to him that he, too, should worship Rama. One day, he and a little Brahmin boy named Hari purchased a clay image of Sita-Rama, and when no one was about, they climbed the stairs that led to a

room on the roof above the women's quarters. After securely closing the door, they installed the image, and sat down to meditate. Meanwhile, parents of both the boys noticed their prolonged absence, and an anxious search for them began. The hunt led at last to the little locked room on the roof. The searchers knocked and shouted, but there was no response. At last their strong blows smashed the latch, and the door flew open. Hari, his meditation disturbed at the first ominous signal, fled down the stairs. But Naren had not heard anything. He was seated before the flower-decked image, motionless in deep meditation. When he did not respond on being called by name, he was shaken out of his meditation; but he insisted on being left alone. So they let him remain, knowing not what to make of it all; for it seemed strange at his age.

Shortly after this, the coachman created a disturbance in Naren's immature mind. One day when the boy was visiting the stable, the talk drifted to marriage, which was something intolerable to this man. With the memory of some bitter personal experience, he forcefully denounced married life, telling his young listener of its difficulties, absurdities, and of the terrible bondage it entails. Naren stood as if terror-struck - as if the spectre of matrimony were already before him. And what of his image of Sita-Rama? He had given all the love and loyalty of his heart to these two very pure personages and worshipped them with all devotion. He had learnt to respect deeply their wonderful characters, had admired their loyalty to one another. But the coachman had thrown too dreadful a meaning over the idea of marriage. And Rama and Sita were married that was enough.

The irreconcilable conflict between the words of the coachman and his regard for the image of Sita-Rama caused deep anguish in his heart, which burst forth in tears. One of the golden dreams of childhood was broken. Naren ran to the women's quarters. The mother saw his tears and inquired what made him sad. There was silence - then loud sobbing, "How

can I worship Sita-Rama? Was not Sita Rama's wife?" he asked. Intuitively, Bhuvaneshwari understood the anguish of her son. But how to console him? Then, as light bursts upon darkness, the thought of Shiva came to her mind. She addressed her son not as Naren but as Vireshwar, and said, "There is Shiva to worship!" These words of the mother settled deeply in Naren's heart.

On the following day Naren bought an image of Shiva with the money given by his mother and he was soon seated before Shiva with eyes closed to all outer things, in the depth of meditation.

But what suffering this had entailed! Poorer than a man despoiled of his wealth is the mind of a child bereft of his illusion. Nevertheless, his devotion to Sita Rama was never destroyed, and the Ramayana had still a great fascination for him.

But it was Shiva, the god of renunciation, whom now he worshipped. Even in childhood he had the fancy of becoming a sannyasi.

The elders of the household had told him, in fun, that if one meditated, one's hair would become as long and matted as the monks', and would gradually enter deep into the earth like the roots of a banyan tree. So the simple child, seated in meditation, would once in a while open his eyes to see if his hair had grown long and matted. But when his expectations were not fulfilled, he ran in bewilderment to his mother, and asked, "I have meditated; but why has no matted hair grown?" His mother consoled him: "It is not grown in an hour or a day. It takes many many days, yes, many many months, before matted locks can be grown." Then the talk drifted to other things. It turned to the Shiva-image he had bought a few days before. He said that while he had sat before the image that morning, the thought of his mother's words-that he had been sent away from the real Shiva because he had been naughty - had come to him

very forcibly. Reincarnation is accepted, unconsciously, as a fact by every Hindu child; so he added, "I think I have been a sadhu once. Will Shiva let me go back to Him if I am good?" The mother answered, "Yes." But her heart sank at the thought that perhaps he, like his grandfather, would renounce the world and return to Shiva. Then she banished the thought, thinking that there were many years yet before he could grow into that discrimination in which he would feel all the joys of the world as an intolerable burden, knowing joy only in the thought of God.

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA THE PATRIOT-SAINT OF INDIA

When we study Swamiji's life we cannot but be convinced that he was unique in all respects. There was no one, who better loved India, who was more proud of this country, who worked more zealously for its well-being. We get a perfect picture of India, its past, present and future from Swamiji's thoughts. That is why Rabindranath Tagore said to Romain Rolland: 'Read Vivekananda if you want to know India.'

Speaking of himself, Swamiji once said that he was a 'Condensed India. Indeed, his love for India was so profound that eventually he became its embodiment. Vivekananda and India became one. Sister Nivedita echoed this conviction when she said: 'India was Swamiji's greatest passion.... India throbbed in his breast, India beat in his pulses, India was his daydream, India was his nightmare. Not only that. He himself became India. He was the embodiment of India in flesh and blood. He was India, he was Bharat - the very symbol of her spirituality her purity, her wisdom, her power, her vision and her destiny.'

It was 1891. Swamiji was staying at Mount Abu as a guest of a Muslim lawyer. One day Jagmohanlal, the Private Secretary of the Raja of Khetri, came to the lawyer's bungalow and was quite surprised to see Swamiji, a Hindu sannyasin, there. Unable to conceal his wonder, Jagmohanlal said to Swamiji: 'Well, Swamiji, you are a Hindu monk. How is it that

you are living with a Muslim?'

Swamiji could never stand the slightest hint of caste and religious discrimination or parochialism of any sort, so he replied in a stern voice: 'Sir, what do you mean? I am a sannyasin. I am above all your social conventions. I can dine even with sweepers, the so-called outcasts. I am not afraid of God, for He sanctions it; I am not afraid of scriptures, for they allow it; but I am afraid of you people and your society. You know nothing of God and the scriptures. I see Brahman everywhere, manifested even in the meanest creature. For me, there is nothing high or low. Shiva, Shiva!' Every word of Swamiji rained fire while Munshi Jagmohanlal stood mesmerised before his towering personality.

Once someone told Swamiji that the monk should have no particular attachment to his country. Instead, he should view all countries as his own. At this, Swamiji replied: "He who fails to love and support his mother how can he provide sustenance for another's mother?" What Swamiji meant was that even the sannyasins should love their motherland. How can he who cannot love his own country, embrace the world? Patriotism first, then universalism.

Swamiji had a deep sense of self-respect and also wanted all Indians to be equally conscious of their self-respect. The following incident prior to his journey to the West will illustrate this point.

Swamiji and Jagmohanlal were sitting inside a railway coach at the Abu Road station, waiting for the train to leave for Bombay. A Bengali admirer of Swamiji who came to see them off was also in the compartment. In the mean time, a European ticket-collector came and harshly ordered the gentleman out of the train. The gentleman was also a railway employee. He tried to convince the ticket-collector that he had done nothing unlawful. But the ticket-collector would not listen to him. As a result there was a heated argument when Swamiji himself intervened. But the European, taking him to be an ordinary

monk, said in an insolent manner, Tum kahe bat karte ho?'

'Why do you interfere?'

The Hindi word 'tum' is used to address intimate friends or inferiors while the word 'aap' denotes either equals or superiors. The disparaging 'tum' angered Swamiji. He said, 'What do you mean by Tum? Can you not behave properly? Why do you not say Aap?' Realizing his mistake, the ticket-collector said, 'I am sorry. I don't know the language well. I only wanted this man...'. Swamiji interrupted him: Just now you said you did not know Hindi well. Now I see that you do not even know your own language well. This "man" of whom you speak is a "gentleman". Swamiji then told the European that he would report his disrespectful actions to the authorities. Quite frightened, the ticket-collector hurriedly left the compartment.

No sooner had the ticket-collector left than Swamiji turned to Jagmohanlal and said: 'You see, what we need in our dealings with the Europeans is self-respect. We should always remain as conscious of our rank and station as others do. Unfortunately, we fail to do so and this failure prompts others to disparage us. We must defend our self-esteem by all means, otherwise we will be slighted and insulted. Mind you, cowardice is the breeding ground of all corruption, of all evils. Indians are no less civilized than anybody else on earth, but they always underestimate themselves. That is why every Tom, Dick and Harry dare to humiliate us, and we stomach the insult silently.

Thus Swamiji taught Indians how to love and respect their country. He was fully confident that the world needed Indian spiritual treasures much more than it needed Western materialism. And this conviction never allowed him to be dazzled by the sparkling affluence of Western civilization, nor did it let him suffer for a moment from any inferiority complex.

It was again out of that unshakable conviction that he proclaimed the glory of Indian civilization and culture. There can be no doubt that his courage and the strength of his conviction inspired thousands of people in the West to love India and its civilization. Insight into how Swamiji was viewed at the historic Parliament of Religions can be had from the words of Dr. Annie Besant.

Dr. Besant wrote, 'Monk, they called him, not unwarrantably, warrior-monk was he, and the first impression was of the warrior rather than of the monk. His figure was instinct with pride of country, pride of race - the representative of the oldest of living religions.... Purposeful, virile, strong, he stood out, a man among men, able to hold his own.'

Swamiji's first lecture at the Parliament of Religions made him so famous that the most distinguished people of Chicago invited him to their homes. Everybody wanted to be his host.

After the first day's session of the Parliament, Swamiji was taken to the mansion of a millionaire and given a royal reception. The host did everything possible to make Swamiji feel comfortable, but Swamiji neither hankered after name and fame nor did he want physical comfort. So even amidst this pomp and grandeur and spontaneous applause from the American people, Swamiji felt uncomfortable. He could not forget how much his countrymen were suffering. His heart continued to bleed for India and he could not sleep on the luxurious bed. He lay on the floor and wept like a child the whole night. He prayed: 'O Mother, who cares for fame when my country is bogged down in deep poverty! We Indians are so miserably poor that millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, while here people spend money lavishly only for personal comforts! Who will raise the Indians and give them food? O Mother, tell me how I can serve them!' Such was Swamiji's burning love for India! He would inspire everybody who came in contact with him to love India. Sister Christine writes: 'Our

love for India came to birth, I think, when we first heard him say the word, "India", in that marvellous voice of his. It seems incredible that so much could have been put into one small word of five letters. There was love, passion, pride, longing, adoration, tragedy, chivalry, and again love. Whole volumes could not have produced such a feeling in others. It had the magic power of creating love in those who heard it. Ever after, India became the land of heart's desire. Everything concerning her became of interest-became living-her people, her history, architecture, her manners and customs, her rivers, mountains, plains, her culture, her great spiritual concepts, her scriptures.'

Before he left London, one of his British friends put this question to him: 'Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?' Swamiji said: 'India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha!'



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SERVICE TO MAN IS SERVICE TO GOD

Narendra's (Swami Vivekananda's) father, Vishwanath Datta, was well-known for his charity. Mahendranath Datta, his second son, writes of him: "The impulse to help the poor was almost like a disease with him.' In his locality he was popularly called 'Vishwanath the benevolent'. He could hardly remain silent when he found someone in distress. He would bear ungrudgingly the educational expenses for the children of his distant relatives and would go out of his way to alleviate the poverty of his neighbours. What is striking is he did not discriminate in matters of charity. He would give financial aid even to non-deserving people. Narendranath noticed this and once drew his father's attention to this gross misuse of money. At this Vishwanath said: "Life is full of suffering, my son! When you grow up you will realize all this yourself and will have pity on one and all.'

Narendranath found a complete expression of this sympathy in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna who transformed his natural compassion into love and reverence for everyone and everything. Sri Ramakrishna taught him that pity is not enough. Man is a living God. Do we ever think of showing pity to God? No, on the contrary, we feel blessed to be able to serve and worship Him. Therefore 'pity' is not the right expression. The right kind of attitude should be to serve 'Jiva' as Shiva', to serve humanity as the manifestation of Divinity. None is to be hated, for even the sinner is essentially God. The Same 'Narayana' (God) is present in the guise of the thief or the person lacking in culture, as well as in the righteous and refined.

Swami Vivekananda thus learnt from his Master to treat every man, even the fallen one, with respect. He used to say: 'God the wicked', 'God the sinner'. He often said: 'If in this hell of a world one can bring a little joy and peace even for a day into the heart of a single person, that much alone is true; this I have learnt after suffering all my life.'

A north Indian pundit once came to Swamiji with the intention of outshining him in a discussion on Vedanta, but Swamiji was in no mood then to discuss Vedanta. He was constantly thinking about the people groaning under the impact of the country-wide famine. He said, "Punditji, first of all try ameliorate the terrible distress that is prevailing everywhere, to still the heart-rending cry of your hungry countrymen for a morsel of food; after that come to me to have a debate on the Vedanta. To stake one's whole life and soul to save thousands who are dying of starvation- this is the essence of the religion of the Vedanta."

Swami Turiyananda (Hari Maharaj) tells of an incident that took place at the Abu Road station when he, with Swami Brahmananda, came to see Swamiji before he left for Bombay. Swamiji said to him on that occasion, 'Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion.' He could not finish all that he wanted to say as he was overwhelmed with an intense emotion that shook his frame and brought a look of profound sadness to his face. But he soon composed himself, and placing his hand on his chest, added, 'But my heart has expanded beyond measure and I have learnt to feel the sufferings of others! Believe me, I literally writhe with pain when anybody suffers!'

Swamiji was again overwhelmed and tears streamed down his cheeks. Swami Turiyananda was stunned. 'Didn't Buddha feel the same way and utter these very words of love?' he thought. He could clearly perceive that the endless misery of millions of people was creating a tempest in Swamiji. His heart

was, as it were, a vast cauldron in which an ointment to redress all the sufferings of mankind was being prepared.

On April 13, 1890, Swamiji, who was then staying at Varanasi, received the sad news that Balaram Bose, his brother disciple, had passed away. He was so shocked that he could not restrain his tears. Pramadas Mitra, a renowned scholar of Varanasi, noticed this and said: 'Swamiji, you are a monk. You should not lament like this.'

Pramadababu's remark hurt Swamiji. He said, 'What do you mean, Pramadababu? It is true I am a monk. But should a monk necessarily be heartless?' Then he continued: "You see, a genuine monk is much more tender-hearted than ordinary souls. After all, we are human beings. And, on top of it all, Balarambabu was my brother disciple. I don't like the kind of asceticism which makes one unfeeling and pitiless!"

Swamiji often used to tell his disciples that he who does not try to do good to others can hardly be called a sannyasin. He repeatedly said that a sannyasin is born to live for others, to comfort the afflicted- be she a mother who has lost her son or a sad widow. He is there to redress the worldly sufferings of mortals as well as to take care of their spiritual need by arousing their latent spirituality.

One winter Swamiji went to Deoghar as a guest of Priyanath Mukherjee accompanied by Swami Niranjanananda. One day, while taking a walk with his brother disciple, Swamiji saw a man lying helpless by the side of the road writhing in pain. Swamiji moved closer to the man and found he was suffering from acute dysentery. He felt the man needed immediate medical treatment, but first, he must be moved from the roadside. But where to take him? He thought of Priyanath's house. However, Swamiji himself was only a guest, how could he take this unknown man there? Priyanathbabu might be offended. He thus hesitated a moment and then made up his mind to serve the helpless man at all

costs. So with the help of Swami Niranjanananda, he brought the man to Priyanathbabu's house and placed him on a bed, cleaned him thoroughly, clothed him and began to apply hot fomentations. As a result, the man soon recovered. Instead of being vexed, Priyanathbabu was filled with admiration for this wonderful expression of Swamiji's love.

The American millionaire Mr. John D. Rockefeller had heard from his friends about Swamiji. They wanted him to meet the extraordinary Indian monk, but on one pretext or another, he refused. He was very strong-willed and it was difficult for anyone to change his decision. But one day, on an impulse Rockefeller went to the house of a friend in Chicago where Swamiji was staying. Brushing aside the butler who opened the door, he demanded to see the Hindu monk.

The butler ushered him into the living room, and not waiting to be announced, Rockefeller entered Swamiji's adjoining study. He was greatly surprised to see Swamiji seated at his writing table not even lifting his eyes to see who had entered. After a while, Swamiji told Rockefeller much about his past that was not known to anyone but himself, and made him understand that the money he had already accumulated was not his, that he was only a channel and that his duty was to do good to the world - that God had given him his wealth in order that he might have an opportunity to help people. Rockefeller was annoyed that anyone dared to talk to him that way. He left the room in irritation, not even saying goodbye. But about a week later, again without being announced, he entered Swamiji's study and finding him the same as before, threw on his desk a paper which told of his plans to donate an enormous sum of money toward the financing of a public institution.

'Well, there you are,' he said, 'you must be satisfied now, and you can thank me for it!' Swamiji didn't even lift his eyes, didn't move. Then taking the paper, he quietly read it and said,

'It is for you to thank me.'

This was Rockefeller's first large donation to the cause of public welfare. Later he became widely known for his philanthropy.

Swamiji was staying at the garden-house of Gopal Lal Seal in Cossipore. One day a young man came to him and said, 'Swamiji, I have visited many places and have had intimate association with many religious sects; yet I find I do not as yet understand what Truth is. Everyday, I close the door and sit in meditation, but peace remains as elusive as ever! Swamiji, tell me why?'

Swamiji patiently listened to him, then he said: "My child, if you want peace, you have to do exactly the opposite of what you have been doing so long. You have to keep your door open, you have to look around. If you do, you will be surprised to find how many people are anxiously waiting for your help! Help them, feed them, give them water to drink - serve them as much as you can. I guarantee, you will get peace.'



For Seniors (Std. VIII to X)

Note :

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IDEAL OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Wheresoever our senses reach, or whatsoever our minds imagine, we find therein the action and reaction of two forces, the one counteracting the other and causing the constant play of the mixed phenomena that we see around us, and of those which we feel in our minds. In the external world, the action of these opposite forces is expressing itself as attraction and repulsion, and in the internal, as love and hatred, good and evil. We repel some things, we attract others. We are attracted by one, we are repelled by another. Many times in our lives we find that without any reason whatsoever we are, as it were, attracted towards certain persons; at other times, similarly, we are repelled by others. This is patent to all, and the higher the field of action, the more potent, the more remarkable are the influences of these opposite forces. Religion is the highest plane of human thought and life, and herein we find that the workings of these two forces have been most marked. The intense love that humanity has ever known has come from religion, and the most diabolical hatred that humanity has known has also come from religion. The noblest words of peace that the world has ever heard have come from men on the religious plane, and the bitterest denunciation that the world has ever known has been uttered by religious men. The higher the object of any religion and the finer its organisation, the more remarkable are its activities. No other human motive has deluged the world with blood so much as religion, at the same time, nothing has brought into existence so many hospitals and asylums for the poor; no other human influence has taken such care, not only of humanity, but also of the lowest of animals, as religion has done.

Nothing makes us so cruel as religion, and nothing makes us so tender as religion. This has been so in the past, and will also, in all probability, be so in the future. Yet out of the midst of this din and turmoil, this strife and struggle, this hatred and jealousy of religions and sects, there have arisen, from time to time, potent voices, drowning all this noise, making themselves heard from pole to pole, as it were - proclaiming peace and harmony. Will it ever come?

Is it possible that there should ever reign unbroken harmony in this plane of mighty religious struggle. The world is exercised in the latter part of this century by the question of harmony; in society, various plans are being proposed, and attempts are made to carry them into practice; but we know how difficult it is to do so. People find that it is almost impossible to mitigate the fury of the struggle of life, to tone down the tremendous nervous tension that is in man. Now, if it is so difficult to bring harmony and peace to the physical plane of life - the external, gross, and outward side of it- then a thousand times more difficult is it to bring peace and harmony to rule over the internal nature of man. I would ask you for the time being to come out of the network of words. We have all been hearing from childhood of such things as love, peace, charity, equality, and universal brotherhood; but they have become to us mere words without meaning, words which we repeat like parrots, and it has become quite natural for us to do so. We cannot help it. Great souls, who first felt these great ideas in their hearts manufactured these words; and at that time many understood their meaning. Later on, ignorant people have taken up those words to play with them and made religion a mere play upon words, and not a thing to be carried into practice. It becomes "my father's religion", "our nation's religion", "our country's religion", and so forth.

We all hear about universal brotherhood, and how societies stand up especially to preach this. I remember an old story. In India, taking wine is considered very bad. There were

two brothers who wished, one night, to drink wine secretly; and their uncle, who was a very orthodox man, was sleeping in a room quite close to theirs. So, before they began to drink, they said to each other, "We must be very silent, or uncle will wake up." When they were drinking, they continued repeating to each other "Silence! Uncle will wake up", each trying to shout the other down. And, as the shouting increased, the uncle woke up, came into the room, and discovered the whole thing. Now, we all shout like these drunken men, "Universal brotherhood! We are all equal, therefore let us make a sect." As soon as you make a sect you protest against equality, and equality is no more.

And so we go in this world in our search after universal brotherhood and equality. When you hear such talk in the world, I would ask you to be a little reticent, to take care of yourselves. For, behind all this talk is often the intense selfishness. "In the winter sometimes a thunder-cloud comes up; it roars and roars, but it does not rain; but in the rainy season the clouds speak not, but deluge the world with water." So those who are real workers, and really feel at heart the universal brotherhood of man, do not talk much, do not make little sects for universal brotherhood; but their acts, their movements, their whole life, show out clearly that they in truth possess the feeling of brotherhood for mankind, that they have love and sympathy for all. They do not speak, they do and they live. This world is too full of blustering talk. We want a little more earnest work, and less talk.

So far we see that it is hard to find any universal features in regard to religion, and yet we know that they exist. We are all human beings, but are we all equal? Certainly not. Who says we are equal? Only the lunatic. Are we all equal in our brains, in our powers, in our bodies? One man is stronger than another, one man has more brain power than another. If we are all equal, why is there this inequality? Who made it? We, because we have more or less powers, more or less brain, more or less

physical strength, it must make a difference between us. Yet we know that the doctrine of equality appeals to our heart. We are all human beings; but some are men, and some are women. Here is a black man, there is a white man; but all are men, all belong to one humanity. Various are our faces; I see no two alike, yet we are all human beings. Where is this one humanity? I find a man or a woman, either dark or fair; and among all these faces I know that there is an abstract humanity which is common to all. I may not find it when I try to grasp it, to sense it, and to actualise it, yet I know for certain that it is there. If I am sure of anything, it is of this humanity which is common to us all. So it is with this universal religion, which runs through all the various religions of the world in the form of God; it must and does exist through eternity. "I am the thread that runs through all these pearls." and each pearl is a religion or even a sect thereof. Such are the different pearls, and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them; only the majority of mankind are entirely unconscious of it.

Unity in variety is the plan of the universe. We are all men, and yet we are all distinct from one another. As a man you are separate from the animal, but as living beings, man, woman, animal, and plant are all one; and as existence, you are one with the whole universe. That universal existence is God, the ultimate Unity in the universe. In Him we are all one. At the same time, in manifestation, these differences must always remain. In our work, in our energies, as they are being manifested outside, these differences must always remain. We find then that if by the idea of a universal religion it is meant that one set of doctrines should be believed in by all mankind, it is wholly impossible. It can never be, there can never be a time when all faces will be the same. Again, if we expect that there will be one universal mythology, that is also impossible; it cannot be. Neither can there be one universal ritual. Such a state of things can never come into existence; if it ever did, the world would be destroyed, because variety is the first principle

of life. What makes us formed beings? Differentiation. Perfect balance would be our destruction. What makes motion possible in this universe?

Lost balance. The unity of sameness can come only when this universe is destroyed, otherwise such a thing is impossible. Not only so, it would be dangerous to have it. We must not wish that all of us should think alike. There would then be no thought to think. We would be all alike, as the Egyptian mummies in a museum, looking at each other without a thought to think. It is this difference, this differentiation, this losing of the balance between us, which is the very soul of our progress, the soul of all our thought. This must always be.

What then do I mean by the ideal of a universal religion? I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all; for I know that this world must go on working, wheel within wheel, this intricate mass of machinery, most complex, most wonderful. What can we do then? We can make it run smoothly, we can lessen the friction, we can grease the wheels, as it were. How? By recognising the natural necessity of variation. Just as we have recognised unity by our very nature, so we must also recognise variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes. We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing. Take for instance the sun. Suppose a man standing on the earth looks at the sun when it rises in the morning; he sees a big ball. Suppose he starts on a journey towards the sun and takes a camera with him, taking photographs at every stage of his journey; until he reaches the sun. The photographs of each stage will be seen to be different from those of the other stage in fact, when he gets back, he brings with him so many photographs of so many different suns, as it would appear; and yet we know that the same sun was photographed by the man at the different stages of his

progress. Even so is it with the Lord. Through high philosophy or low, through the most exalted mythology or the grossest, through the most refined ritualism or arrant fetishism; every sect, every soul, every nation, every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling upward, towards God; every vision of truth that man has, is a vision of Him and of none else. Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to fetch water from a lake. One has a cup, another a jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case naturally takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us. He who brought the cup has the water in the form of a cup; he who brought the jar - his water is in the shape of a jar and so forth; but, in every case, water, and nothing but water, is in the vessel. So it is in the case of religion; our minds are like these vessels, and each one of us is trying to arrive at the realisation of God. God is like that water filling these different vessels, and in each vessel the vision of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet He is One. He is God in every case. This is the only recognition of universality that we can get.

So far it is all right theoretically. But is there any way of practically working out this harmony in religions? We find that this recognition that all the various views of religion are true has been very very old. Hundreds of attempts have been made in India, in Alexandria, in Europe, in China, in Japan, in Tibet, and lastly in America, to formulate a harmonious religious creed, to make all religions come together in love. They have, all failed, because they did not adopt any practical plan. Many have admitted that all the religions of the world are right, but they show no practical way of bringing them together, so as to enable each of them to maintain its own individuality in the conflux. That plan alone is practical, which does not destroy the individuality of any man in religion and at the same time shows him a point of union with all others. But so far, all the plans of religious harmony that have been tried, while proposing to take in all the various views of religion, have, in practice, tried to bind them all down to a few doctrines, and so

have produced more new sects, fighting, struggling, and pushing against each other.

I would ask mankind to recognise this maxim, "Do not destroy". Iconoclastic reformers do no good to the world. Break not, pull not anything down, but build. Help, if you can; if you cannot, fold your hands and stand by and see things go on. Do not injure, if you cannot render help. Say not a word against any man's convictions so far as they are sincere. Our watchword, then, will be acceptance and not exclusion. Not only toleration for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance.

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For Seniors (Std. VIII to X)

Note :

1. Time Allotted : 3 minutes.
2. Please confine to the given text.
3. Evaluation by the judges :
(a) Content : 30 marks. (b) Clarity : 10 marks. (c) Impact : 10 marks.

OUR DUTY TOWARDS OUR MOTHERLAND - ACCORDING TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; Such a thing can never be.... Will she die? This old Mother of all that is noble or moral or spiritual, the land which the sages trod, the land in which Godlike men still live and breathe? I will borrow the lantern of the Athenian sage and follow you, my brother, through the cities and villages, plains and forests, of this broad world-show me such men in other lands if you can.

The debt which the world owes to our Motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much as to the patient Indian, the mild Indian... Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of the modern Europeans lived in the forests and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it, and peace before it.

Can you adduce any reason why India should lie in the ebb-tide of the Aryan nations? Is she inferior in intellect? Is she inferior in dexterity? Can you look at her art, at her mathematics, at her philosophy, and answer 'yes'? All that is needed is that she should de-hypnotize herself and wake up from her age long sleep to take her true rank in the hierarchy of

nations... The national ideals of India are RENUNCIATION and SERVICE.

Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself.

This national ship of ours, ye children of the Immortals, my countrymen, has been plying for ages, carrying civilization and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures. For scores of shining centuries, this national ship of ours has been ferrying across the ocean of life, and has taken millions of souls to the other shore, beyond all misery. But today, it may have sprung a leak and got damaged, through your own fault or whatever cause it matters not. What would you, who have placed yourselves in it, do now? Would you go about cursing it and quarrelling among yourselves! Would you not all unite together and put your best efforts to stop the holes? Let us all gladly give our hearts' blood to do it; and if we fail in the attempt, let us all sink and die together, with blessings and not curses on our lips.

There are many things to be done, but means are wanting in this country. We have brains, but no hands. We have the doctrine of Vedanta, but we have not the power to reduce it into practice. In our books, there is the doctrine of universal equality, but in work we make great distinctions. It was in India that unselfish and disinterested work of the most exalted type was preached, but in practice we are awfully cruel, awfully heartless - unable to think of anything besides our own mass-of-flesh bodies.... I too believe that India will awake again, if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country - bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, down-trodden, ever-starved, quarrelsome, and envious. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in

the vortex of destitution and ignorance.

I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail, until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.

Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad; then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy. Struggle, struggle, was my motto for the last ten years. Struggle, still say I. When it was all dark, I used to say, struggle; when light is breaking in, I still say, struggle. Be not afraid, my children.

Let New India arise out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains.

What we want are some young men who will renounce everything and sacrifice their lives for their country's sake. We should first form their lives and then some real work can be expected. My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions. I have formulated the idea and have given my life to it.... They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India.

None will be able to resist truth and love and sincerity. are you sincere? unselfish even unto death? and loving? Then fear not, not even death. Onward, my lads! The whole world requires Light. It is expectant! India alone has that Light, not in magic mummeries, and charlatanism, but in the teaching of the glories of the spirit of real religion - of the highest spiritual

truth. That is why the Lord has preserved the race through all its vicissitudes unto the present day. Now the time has come. Have faith that you are all, my brave lads, born to do great things! Let not the barks of puppies frighten you- no, not even the thunderbolts of heaven - but stand up and work!

Have fire and spread all over. Work, work. Be the servant while leading. Be unselfish, and never listen to one friend in private accusing another. Have infinite patience, and success is yours..... Take care! Beware of everything that is untrue; stick to truth, and we shall succeed, maybe slowly, but surely. Work as if on each of you depended the whole work. Fifty centuries are looking on you, the future of India depends on you. Work on.

Work unto death - I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you. This life comes and goes wealth, fame, enjoyments are only of a few days. It is better, far better to die on the field of duty, preaching the truth than to die like a worldly worm. Advance! Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men.

Learn obedience first. Among the western nations, with such a high spirit of independence, the spirit of obedience is equally strong. We are all of us self-important, which never produces any work. Great enterprise, boundless courage, tremendous energy, and above all, perfect obedience - these are the only traits that lead to individual and national regeneration. These traits are altogether lacking in us. Unless the commanding officer goes ahead and faces death, the rank and file will never fight with heart. 'A captain must sacrifice his head.' If you can lay down your life for a cause, then only you can be a leader. But we all want to be leaders without making the necessary sacrifice. And the result is zero - nobody listens to us!

Numbers do not count, nor does wealth or poverty; a handful of men can throw the world off its hinges, provided

they are united in thought, word, and deed - never forget this conviction. The more opposition there is, the better. Does a river acquire velocity unless there is resistance? The newer and better a thing is, the more opposition it will meet with at the outset. It is opposition which foretells success.

If you are really my children, you will fear nothing, stop at nothing. You will be like lions. We must rouse India and the whole world..... My children must be ready to jump into fire, if needed, to accomplish their work.

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others - I should rather be glad to see you do that!.... Get up, and put your shoulders to the wheel- how long is this life for? As you have come into this world, leave some mark behind. Otherwise, where is the difference between you and the trees and stones?

My boy, when death is inevitable, is it not better to die like heroes than as stocks and stones? And what is the use of living a day or two more in this transitory world? It is better to wear out than to rust out - specially for the sake of doing the least good to others.

India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love.... One vision I see clear as life before me, that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne - rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction.

Let us all work hard, my brethren; this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of the India of the future. She is here ready waiting. She is only sleeping. Arise and awake, and see her seated here, on her eternal throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was - this motherland of ours.

For Seniors (Std. VIII to X)

Note :

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2. Please confine to the given text.
3. Evaluation by the judges :
(a) Content : 30 marks. (b) Clarity : 10 marks. (c) Impact : 10 marks.

YOU ARE THE MAKER OF YOUR OWN DESTINY

One of the greatest lessons I have learned in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end.... I have been always learning great lessons from that one principle and it appears to me that all the secret of success is there: to pay as much attention to the means as to the end.

Men in general lay all the blame of life on their fellowmen, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate. Where is fate, and who is fate? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own fate. None else has the blame, none has the praise. The wind is blowing; those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is that the fault of the wind?

Say, "This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone. That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else, I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves.

Make your own future. 'Let the dead past bury its dead.' The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, thought, and deed lays up a store for you, and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power

of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever.

We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. If you project hatred and jealousy, they will rebound on you with compound interest. No power can avert them, when once you have put them in motion, you will have to bear them. Remembering this will prevent you from doing wicked things.

Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time, it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself.

Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all - love. Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility! Not because somebody way back there was good!

The road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed, no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles. Go on doing good, thinking holy thoughts continuously, that is the only way to suppress base impressions. Never say any man is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a bundle of habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character... The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will power.

If you really want to judge the character of a man, look not at his great performances. Every fool may become a hero at one time or another. Watch a man do his most common actions;

those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of a great man. Great occasions rouse even the lowest of human beings to some kind of greatness, but he alone is the really great man whose character is great always, the same wherever he be

Every good thought that we send to the world, without thinking of any return, will be stored up there and make us purer and purer, until we become the purest of mortals. For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.

What is the use of fighting and complaining? That will not help us to better things. He who grumbles at the little thing that has fallen to his lot to do, will grumble at everything. Always grumbling, he will lead a miserable life, and everything will be a failure. But that man who does his duty as he goes, putting his shoulder to the wheel, will see the light, and higher and higher duties will fall to his share.

This world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong. Do not fly away from the wheels of the world-machine, but stand inside it and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out.

Why should you not try to hit the mark? We become wiser through failures. Time is infinite. Look at the wall. Did the wall ever tell a lie? It is always the wall. Man tells a lie-and becomes a god, too. It is better to do something; never mind even if it proves to be wrong; it is better than doing nothing. The cow never tells a lie; but she remains a cow, all the time. Do something!

Unfortunately, in this life, the vast majority of persons are groping through this dark life without any ideal at all. If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal. My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few

words, and that is; to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

This human body is the greatest body in the universe, and a human being the greatest being. Man is higher than all animals, than all angels; none is greater than man.

Everything is conscious which rebels against nature; there, consciousness is manifested. Just try to kill a little ant, even it will once resist to save its life. Where there is struggle, where there is rebellion, there is the sign of life, there consciousness is manifested. Man begins to struggle and fight against nature. He makes many mistakes, he suffers. But eventually, he conquers nature and realizes his freedom. When he is free, nature becomes his slave.

Man is man, so long as he is struggling to rise above nature, and this nature is both internal and external.... And if we read the history of nations between the lines, we shall always find that the rise of a nation comes with an increase in the number of such men.

All healthy social changes are the manifestations of the spiritual forces working within, and if these are strong and well adjusted, society will arrange itself accordingly. Each individual has to work out his own salvation; there is no other way, and so also with nations. ... It is very easy to point out the defects of institutions, all being more or less imperfect, but he is the real benefactor of humanity who helps the individual to overcome his imperfections under whatever institutions he may live. The individuals being raised, the nation and its institutions are bound to rise.

Each work has to pass through these stages - ridicule, opposition, and then acceptance. Each man who thinks ahead of his time is sure to be misunderstood. So opposition and persecution are welcome, only I have to be steady and pure and must have immense faith in God, and all these will vanish. 'Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die.' Be of good

cheer and believe that we are selected by the Lord to do great things, and we will do them. 'It is the coward and the fool who says, "This is fate" -So says the Sanskrit proverb. But it is the strong man who stands up and says, "I will make my fate."

We can overcome difficulties by constant practice. We must learn that nothing can happen to us, unless we make ourselves susceptible to it. I was once travelling in the Himalayas and the long road stretched before us. We poor monks cannot get anyone to carry us, so we had to make all the way on foot. There was an old man with us.... He said, 'Oh, Sir, how to cross it; I cannot walk any more; my chest will break.' I said to him, 'Look down at your feet.' He did so, and I said, "The road that is under your feet is the road that you have passed over and is the same road that you see before you; it will soon be under your feet.' The highest things are under your feet, because you are Divine Stars.

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy - by one, or more, or all of these - and be free. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

Go and preach to all: 'Arise, awake, sleep no more; within each of you, there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe this, and that power will be manifested.'.... If you can think that infinite power, infinite knowledge, and indomitable energy lie within you, and if you can bring out that power, you also can become like me.

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