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Preface

Unlike Vedanta — a subject of study for those with a philosophical inclination — the Vedantic Way of Living distinctly becomes a direct personal pursuit for a genuine seeker, bestowing upon him immediate benefits of inner strength, stability and harmony. It has a special appeal for intelligent men and women the world over, especially for those who have the keenness to appreciate the values of discipline, refinement and sublimity in whatever they do and think. The character and quality, which the Vedantic Way of Living preserves, though ancient, are immensely relevant to the modern age and civilization.

When you consider the length of time mankind has lived on this earth, the human personality virtually becomes ageless. Yet, does it today have more than five senses (eye, ear, tongue, nose and skin) to perceive and interact with the world? The mind also thrives equally on the same emotions and imaginations, which it had fostered, enjoyed and suffered ages ago. That is why the thoughts and pursuits of Vedic thinkers remain relevant even today.

What is your personality made up of? Where does it get terminated or exhausted? Is it limited by the body you have? Or, is the body the first external factor pointing to something deeper and greater?

Begin, no doubt, from the five senses, but go deeper to transcend the mind and reach the level of intelligence. Stop not. Delve further. You will find then a depth and vastness, which, as the inner perception and sensitiveness grow, will be found to be immense and endless. It is then that you strike the Immortal Soul, which is unlike everything the senses perceive outwardly and the mind generally thinks of.

Like the centre of a circle, It comes first. The huge circle of the universe exists and subsists on this centre. It is a mystery that your mortal body hosts and preserves such an invisible immortal magnitude. Realise this truth and enjoy the supreme benefits of permanence and perpetual harmony.

This is the message of supreme wisdom and peace that Vedantic thoughts inspiringly give even today. Entirely distinct from objective sciences, independent of all kinds of experimental aids and processes, the Vedantic Way of Living is based solely upon the seekers' mind, intelligence and heart.

Viveka, the art and process of discrimination leading to a full understanding and evaluation of worldly life and objects, is the supreme quality and wealth of the Vedantic seeker. In its intensity, introspection grows in depth and magnitude. The tensions and conflicts of the mind, which worldly life brings in abundance, begin to fall. Lightness and clarity dawn.

The same mind, which is now given to think, generating more and more of chaos, will start receding from outward propensities, to be enriched by the intervening spells of self-absorption. Its ability to receive and assimilate any kind of input enhances greatly. Intelligence plays a vital role by reflecting upon the endless magnitude and potential of the Soul, and thereby bestowing on the mind a vastness and immensity, robbing the external expanse and variety of their undue importance and pressure.

The harmony between this inner dimension and external involvements graces the seeker's thoughts, actions and movements, making them deep, powerful and peaceful. Before long the seeker heads towards the great spiritual goal called *Ātma-jñāna* or *Jīvanmukti*. Depending upon his intensity, astuteness and mastery, he attains the coveted goal sooner or later.

From the mind's superficial weakness to its own hidden strength, from the intelligence's doubt and ignorance to its own great depths of clarity and wisdom, from the heart's conventional constrictions and narrowness to its own sublime heights of expanse and nobility – this is the enrichment the Vedantic Way of Living brings to the human soul. Who will not like to be graced by it?

Hariḥ Om Tat Sat.

Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

Narayanashrama Tapovanam
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Vedantic Way of Living

Blessed souls, it pleases me to be in your midst for a short period as this. During this period, I shall talk to you on a theme most dear to your hearts and extremely nourishing to your minds and souls.

Our land is a holy one. The people who live on it are greatly fortunate and blessed. The reason for it is the greatness of the spiritual wealth which our country and people possessed thousands of years ago and which even today is found with us, perhaps in a lesser measure.

This spiritual wealth is found in the Vedas. The Vedas are the words of Truth revealed by the most ancient thinkers of our land, the *Ṛshis*. Before revealing the Vedas they had done prolonged penance and meditation. Vedas are to us the basic books of knowledge, a sacred mass of literature from which we can gather the immortal religious and spiritual truths.

Our forefathers had an intense love for knowledge. They were bent upon discovering the most subtle and abstruse laws relating to the human life and soul. To this end they thought and thought until their thinking mind itself gave way to rip open the mystery of existence, not merely of themselves but of the entire creation. The Vedas, more so the Vedanta, embody the exalted inner spiritual states reached by our ancient thinkers and the truths they perceived while remaining in those states. Being so, not to show enough of love and respect to the Vedas will be to betray our own heredity, our own parentage. If you are an Indian, then you should be a lover of the Vedas too. Else, declare that you are not an Indian.

To study and understand the Vedic literature will be to sharpen your power of understanding to aid and fulfil your quest for knowledge,

peace and well-being. It is not, as some are apt to think, to delight in 'prospects and prophecies' that the Vedas teach us. It is, on the other hand, to think seriously about 'the **immediate** and the **present**' and thereafter to act upon it with a full measure of wisdom and concern. The Vedas help us to understand our life fully and then work our way to fulfilment. They urge us more *to know* than *to do* or *not to do*. But this is a fact seldom understood by the Vedic followers.

With these words of introduction, let me go into the subject for today's talk. But before that, I must express my love and gratitude to all of you for having assembled here to think aloud with me and understand the spiritual truths.

In this series of talks, each day we will take up one subject. All the subjects are closely connected with one another, and they come under the broad title "Vedantic Way of Living".

Today, I shall provide an introduction which will enable you to understand what Vedanta is and what bearing it has on our day-to-day life and work. For this, we shall analyse the very title 'Vedantic Way of Living', and see what it denotes.

The title can be divided into two parts. One part would be 'way of living' and the other 'Vedantic'. What do these signify?

'Living' is a word quite meaningful to all. Everyone has to face the facts of life and living for the simple reason that he has been born in this world. Thus, to live becomes a natural urge for us all. But before proceeding to live, we should study and know what our life is, and then evolve the right ideals of living.

In other words, our nature prompts us to evolve the right manner of living, one which will gain for us the ideals we set before us and thereby lead us to fulfilment. Why is this so? What makes an enquiry into life and living necessary for us?

We, the human beings are living creatures like so many other creatures in the world. We generally mean by 'creature' a living thing or organism

endowed with the five senses of perception. Whatever thing is found to possess these senses is called a living creature. Thus worms, insects, reptiles, birds, animals, etc., are classified as creatures. The human too is a kind of creature, no doubt. But he differs greatly from the other creatures. The difference is not so much in the shape of his body, or in the powers of his senses or the number of his limbs. If you describe man as a double-footed animal, then there are several others like him. So, the difference is not merely an outer one. It is primarily one of the mind, something inner and finer. The following verse will clarify the point:

आहारनिद्राभयमैथुनानि
समानि चैतानि नृणां पशूनाम् ।
ज्ञानं नराणामधिको विशेषो
ज्ञानेन हीनाः पशुभिः समानाः ॥

*āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunāni
samāni caitāni nṛṇām paśūnām ।
jñānaṃ narāṇām-adhiko viśeṣo
jñānena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ ॥*

With regard to the needs for food, sleep and security from fear, says the verse, we and the other creatures have no difference at all. We eat food and so too the animals. The need for sleep is also common. The sense of fear and the urge to get away from it are dominant in both humans and animals alike.

But there is something which the animals lack and we possess. It is the thirst for knowledge, for wisdom, and the power to quench it. Truly it is the power and will to achieve knowledge that mark Man as a superior creation. Being so, if he fails to **culture knowledge** and abide by it in all that he does and thinks, it would be the forsaking of his humanness and descending to the animal level.

Judged from this angle, to enquire into and know our life and living becomes a sheer necessity for us. A careful study of our life and the

selection of the right ideals in it will alone quench our thirst for knowledge. To show the least neglect in this regard would be wrong, ignoble and damaging.

I must say a thousand times that in man it is knowledge that works topmost. But in animals it is not so; it need not be either. For instance, the cow eats fodder and drinks water every day. In spite of it, does the animal know what its food is made up of, what purpose it serves, which items are poisonous, etc.? There are several instances where cows and other animals have died merely on taking poisonous food.

But think of man. Even before he takes his food, he can, know what it is made of, whether it is poisonous or not, etc. He knows that the water he drinks is, though a liquid, composed of two gases: hydrogen and oxygen. Thus, for the human beings there is a clear chance for gaining and culturing knowledge at all times, in all matters. And this possibility alone renders our life creative and successful. To be successful on earth, therefore, what we should first do is to analyse and understand the implications of life and living. This is how Vedanta or practical philosophy stands before us as a subject of interest and utility.

A study of Vedanta is truly a study of our life itself. "What is life?" This is one of the main questions which Vedanta takes up for study. We shall discuss this question tomorrow taking it as a full subject for the talk. Today our object is to understand the place and meaning of the Vedas and Vedanta.

Our sages had a unique habit. It was to relate every branch of study and knowledge to God or the Divine. They were first religious before they were anything else. Naturally, the religious life and thinking were to them the foundation for everything. Hence, they went on thinking religiously about the causes of the world, its existence and operation.

Human thinking on any subject, has to be a gradual process. No attempt at knowledge can generally fruition all of a sudden. This was true of the religious thinking of our *Rshis* too. Hence, their thinking was marked by a beginning, a base. It then underwent a gradual progression. And