

## THE WIT AND WISDOM OF VIVEKANANDA

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One of the most beautiful aspects of Swami Vivekananda's writings is that the language is simple and witty. Not only are the essential truths conveyed to us in simple, often poetic language but they are told to us with a tinge of humor. We are fortunate to have these writings and views of Swamiji because they give us his human side. He was an individual like you and me and it must have been quite fun to hear him make his jokes. But as they say, even the jokes of a realised being will transport us to the divine realm. We are told that Sri Ramakrishna used to make jokes and Rakhal (later Swami Brahmananda) was often seen rolling on the floor with laughter. He just couldn't stop himself. Unfortunately, much of that has not been recorded and a good chunk of it is missing from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Still, thanks to M. 's faithful recording, we do see Sri Ramakrishna making a few jokes now and then, singing devotional songs and the like. All of this paints a human picture of a divine personality and this is essential for our meditation and spiritual growth. The topic of Sri Ramakrishna's humour will be reserved for a later occasion. In this talk, I want to focus on the wit and wisdom of Swami Vivekananda.

Surprisingly, the material is extensive and I am told by Swami Tyagananda that there is even a book in Bengali devoted to this theme. I have not seen this book and I do not know Bengali, but I am sure the material in that book is vaster than the few themes I will touch upon below. No doubt, more research needs to be done on this fascinating aspect of Vivekananda's life and teaching.

To begin, the most obvious humorous example that comes to my mind is this passage from his essay entitled 'Realisation' in the work on Jnana Yoga: "We see this universe as human beings, and our God is our human explanation of the universe. Suppose a cow were philosophical and had religion, it would have a cow universe, and a cow solution of the problem, and it would not be possible that it should see our God. Suppose cats became philosophers, they would see a cat universe and have a cat solution of the problem and a cat ruling it. So we see from this that our explanation of the universe is not the whole of the solution."

What a beautiful way to summarize the philosophical and religious babble of the human race. On one hand, the images of a cow or a cat ruling the universe, is a funny one. At the same time, we see that this is exactly our position. Our minds are limited. No matter how hard we try, our view is necessarily a limited one. Simultaneously, Swami Vivekananda is commenting on the foolishness of the human conflict between various religions. Each of the religions has risen in diverse climes and diverse races to suit the needs of that community. And the conflict between various religions that we have seen since the dawn of history and we find in the modern world, is as ridiculous as the argument whether we are living in a 'cow universe' or a 'cat universe.' That is, our position is not that much different

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from that of the cows and cats. How humourously Swami Vivekananda has summarised the discord among the world religions.

He writes, “We only know the universe from the point of view of beings with five senses. Suppose we obtain another sense, the whole universe must change for us. Suppose we had a magnetic sense, it is quite possible that we might then find millions and millions of forces in existence which we do not know, and for which we have no present sense or feeling.”

Now this passage is extremely interesting for various reasons. Not only does it elaborate on the previous funny image of the cow universe, but it tells us that we are limited by our sensory apparatus. This lecture, ‘Realisation’, was delivered in London on the 29th of October 1896. The most astounding scientific discovery of the 19th century was Maxwell’s theory of electricity and magnetism. In 1831, Michael Faraday discovered that magnetism can make electricity and this had immense technological impact. For one thing, it led to the development of the dynamo with which the power of a waterfall is converted to electricity. When the King of England was told about Faraday’s discovery, the King asked him of what use it was. Faraday couldn’t answer and only said, ‘I don’t know what use it has, but I am sure that one day you will tax it.’ And sure enough, today we do!

But returning to Maxwell, we find that in 1861, he wrote his first paper on electromagnetism. He discovered that electricity and magnetism were interchangeable and that there were precise mathematical formulas relating the two. This is just two years before the birth of Swami Vivekananda. Thus, the scientific revolution synthesizing these two forces of nature was in the air. Moreover, these discoveries led to a new theory of light. The visible light that we see is only a narrow segment of the larger spectrum. The 19th century was notable for its discovery of infrared and ultraviolet rays, light at lower and higher frequencies, both invisible to the naked eye. There were more invisible forces that were slowly discovered one after another. In 1888, Heinrich Hertz discovered radio waves. In 1895, X-rays were discovered by William Röntgen, in 1896, radioactivity by Henri Becquerel, Pierre and Marie Curie, and in 1897, the electron by J.J. Thomson, each of these being Nobel prize winning work. All of these discoveries emanated from the single idea of electromagnetism.

Thus, Swami Vivekananda was up to date in his scientific knowledge of the time. He saw that a new view of the universe was opening up. Our senses are limited indeed, and there were forces of nature that were invisible to us, simply because of our constitution. In Karma Yoga, the lecture entitled ‘Each is Great in His Own Place,’ contains the following analogy that was surely inspired by the great scientific discoveries of the time. “The extreme positive and the extreme negative are always similar. When the vibrations of light are too slow, we do not see them, nor do we see them when they are too rapid. So with sound; when very low in pitch, we do not hear it; when very high, we do not hear it either. Of like nature is the difference between resistance and non-resistance. One man does not resist because he is weak, lazy and cannot, not because he will not; the other man knows that he can strike an irresistible blow if he likes; yet he not only does not strike, but blesses his enemies. ... Buddha gave up his throne and renounced his position, that was true renunciation; but there cannot be any question of renunciation in the case of a

beggar who has nothing to renounce.” What a beautiful summary of the message of the Bhagavad -Gita and the essence of Karma Yoga! Often we deceive ourselves, and religion is used as a cloak to hide our weaknesses. To be a true seeker, we must be honest with ourselves and examine our motives and determine whether we are at the low end or the high end of the spectrum. Invariably, we will find that it is the former. That realisation itself is the first step that will take us forward.

The analogy with the spectrum of light is used again by Vivekananda in his lectures on Raja Yoga. “What we call knowledge,” he writes “is a lower state than the one beyond knowledge. You must always bear in mind that the extremes look very much alike. If a very low vibration of ether is taken as darkness, an intermediate state as light, very high vibration will be darkness again. Similarly, ignorance is the lowest state, knowledge is the middle state and beyond knowledge is the highest state, the two extremes of which seem the same.” (Vol. 1, p. 213)

The same imagery is used in his reply to the address at Pamban. Swamiji says, “I discard the idea that India was ever passive. Nowhere has activity been more pronounced than in this blessed land of ours, and the great proof of this activity is that our most ancient and magnanimous race still lives, and every decade in its glorious career seems to take on fresh youth - undying and imperishable. This activity manifests here in religion. But it is a peculiar fact in human nature that it judges others according to its own standard of activity. Take, for instance, a shoemaker. He understands only shoemaking and thinks there is nothing in this life except the manufacturing of shoes. A bricklayer understands nothing but bricklaying and proves this alone in his life from day to day. And there is another reason which explains this. When the vibrations of light are very intense, we do not see them, because we are so constituted that we cannot go beyond our own plane of vision. But the yogi with his spiritual introspection is able to see through the materialistic veil of the vulgar crowds.” (Vol. 3, p. 138) What a beautiful way of explaining the tremendous conservatism of human nature.

I opened this lecture with the image of the ‘cow universe’. The cow keeps coming up again and again as a source of humor in the life of Swami Vivekananda. For instance, on his return from America in 1897, he is conversing with his disciple Sarat Chandra Chakravarti when an enthusiastic preacher belonging to the society for the protection of cows comes to meet Swamiji. He was dressed with a gerua turban, as if he were a sanyasin, and walking over to Swamiji presented him with a picture of the mother-cow. Swamiji takes the picture and hands it over to someone standing near by. He asks the preacher, “What is the object of your society?” The preacher responds by saying, “We protect the mother-cows of our country ... cow infirmaries have been founded in some places where diseased, decrepit mother-cows ... are provided for.” Swamiji asks him, “What is the source of your income?” The preacher says, “The work of the society is carried on only by gifts kindly made by great men like you.” Then, Swamiji says, “A terrible famine has now broken out in Central India. The Indian Government has published a death-roll of 900,000 starved people. Has your society done anything to render help in this time of famine?” The preacher replies, “We do not help during famine or other distresses. This society has been established only for the protection of mother-cows.” One can see Swami getting irritated.

He asks, “During a famine when lakhs of people, your own brothers and sisters, have fallen into the jaws of death, you have not thought it your duty, though having the means to help them in that terrible calamity with food! ” The preacher answers, “No. This famine broke out as a result of men’s karma, their sins. It is a case of ‘like Karma, like fruit.’ ” Now I describe the event from the diary of the disciple.

“Hearing the words of the preacher, sparks of fire, as it were, scintillated in Swamiji’s large eyes; his face became flushed. But he suppressed his feeling and said, “Those associations which do not feel sympathy for men, and even seeing their own brothers dying from starvation, do not give them a handful of rice to save their lives, while giving away piles of food to save birds and beasts, I have not the least sympathy for, and I do not believe that society derives any good from them. If you make the plea of Karma by saying that men die through their Karma, then it becomes a settled fact that it is useless to try or struggle for anything in this world; and your work for the protection of animals is no exception. With regard to your cause also, it can be said - the mother-cows through their own Karma fall into the hands of the butchers and die, and we need not do anything in the matter.” The preacher was a little abashed and said, “Yes, what you say is true, but the Shastras say that the cow is our mother.” Swamiji smilingly said, “Yes that the cow is our mother, I understand: who else could give birth to *such* accomplished children?” The up-country preacher did not speak further on the subject; perhaps he could not understand the point of Swamiji’s poignant ridicule. He told Swamiji that he was begging something of him for the objects of the society.”

Then, Swamiji says, “I am a sanyasin ... Where shall I find money enough to help you? But if ever I get money in my possession, I shall first spend that in the service of man. Man is first to be saved; he must be given food, education and spirituality. If any money is left after doing all these, then only something would be given to your society.” After the preacher had left, the Swamiji began to speak to the monks in the room: “What words, these, ... Says he that men are dying by reason of their Karma, so what avails doing any kindness to them! ... Do you see how much abused the Karma theory of your hinduism has been? ” (Vol. 6, p. 449)

This lack of thinking power is not limited to such slanted priorities. How often do we see that people spend more time with their pets than with their children. We have to walk the dog, but our own child can be entrusted to day care or the tv set. Worse still, we throw the responsibility on the schools and expect them to churn out good citizens. This story, humourous as it is on one side, also reflects how topsy-turvy the thinking of many people can be. And this lack of brain power is not confined to any country or clime; it seems to be global.

In all of his writings, Swami Vivekananda isolates that we should guard against this complacency. The first thing to do is to make the organism strong so that we can think properly. In a dialogue with the same disciple, Swamiji says, “The people of this land must be fed and clothed - must be awakened - must be made more fully active. Otherwise, they will become inert, as inert as trees and stones. So I say, eat large quantities of fish and meat, my boy!” (Vol. 5, p. 403)

On the subject of physical exercise, Swami said, "You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the gita." Here again, what most people do is to make themselves weak and feel they are becoming more and more spiritual when in fact the opposite is happening. They are becoming more and more inert. One should guard against this weakness. In the lecture entitled 'Vedanta and Indian Life', Swamiji says, 'We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it. First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.'" (Vol. 3, p. 242)

Here we see Swamiji's emphasis on physical exercise. True, one should not become a fanatic of exercise as is common nowadays, but a daily walk is essential to our well-being. Many of our mental ailments can be traced to poor physical health.

In his lecture entitled 'East and the West,' Swamiji explains that the whole nation has sunk to the level of *tamas*, inactivity, and has deluded itself into thinking it has reached a high state beyond activity. "Is not doing work, though mixed with good and evil, better than doing nothing and passing an idle and inactive life, and being like stones?" he asks. "The cow never tells a lie, and the stone never steals, but, nevertheless, the cow remains a cow and the stone a stone. Man steals and man tells lies, and again it is man that becomes a god." (Vol. 5, p. 451)

In his first public lecture in the east, Swami Vivekananda makes the provocative statement that 'education has yet to be in the world, and civilisation - civilisation has begun nowhere yet.' There is this famous joke about Mahatma Gandhi being asked what he thought of western civilisation. Gandhi replied, 'I think it will be a good idea.' Swamiji writes, "Ninety-nine decimal nine percent of the human race are more or less savages even now. We may read of these things in books, and we hear of toleration in religion and all that, but very little of it is there yet in the world; take my experience for that." (Vol. 3, p.114)

And later, in his talk entitled "The Mission of the Vedanta", Swamiji says, "If you go to the West and live there as I have done, you will know that even some of the biggest professors you hear of are arrant cowards and dare not say, for fear of public opinion, a hundredth part of what they hold to be really true in religious matters. Therefore the world is waiting for this grand idea of universal toleration. It will be a great acquisition to civilisation. Nay, no civilisation can long exist unless this idea enters into it. No civilisation can grow unless fanaticism, bloodshed, and brutality stop. No civilisation can begin to lift up its head until we look charitably upon one another; and the first step towards that much-needed charity is to look charitably and kindly upon the religious conviction of

others.” (Vol. 3, p. 188) Now we understand what he meant when civilisation has not yet begun on this planet. It is somewhat frightening to learn this.

A famous philosopher of America, Robert Ingersoll said to Vivekananda that if he had come to preach 50 years ago to America, he would have been skinned alive. He may even have been burned at the stake. (Vol. 2, p. 27) Even as recently as the 20th century, when Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was to speak in England, the great English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, said that there was nothing this oriental can teach him and didn't go to this lecture. After the first lecture was delivered, the text was printed in the newspaper which Russell read and realised what he had missed. Then, Russell went to the second lecture. You can imagine the climate of racism that must have been present in those days, when a great thinker like Bertrand Russell writes, “It must be appallingly tragic to be civilised and educated and belong to such a country as India.” (See Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. 2, p. 61) This was early 20th century, we are speaking about. So you can imagine the intolerance at the time of Vivekananda in America.

So we see that even so-called learned scholars are not immune from the intellectual prejudices of the day. I sometimes think that the so-called educated leaders, instead of giving vision and leadership, give rationalisation for our stupidities. Generally there is confusion concerning what education is and what information is. In ‘Future of India,’ Swamiji says, “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. ‘The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood.’ If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias are the Rishis.” (Vol. 3, p. 302)

It is enlightening to have the perspective of Vivekananda in matters of history. He has always emphasized that there is a movement of ideas, whether we know it or not. And in the grand scheme of things, readjustments are made according to the need of the society. A nation lives only if it is charitable. In “My Plan of Campaign”, he says, “In this land of charity, let us take up the energy of the first charity, let us take up the diffusion of spiritual knowledge. And that diffusion should not be confined within the bounds of India; it must go out all over the world. This has been the custom. Those that tell you that Indian thought never went outside of India, those that tell you that I am the first sanyasin who went to foreign lands to preach, do not know the history of their own race. Again and again, this phenomenon has happened. Whenever the world has required it, this perennial flood of spirituality has overflowed and deluged the world. Gifts of political knowledge can be made with the blast of trumpets and the march of cohorts. Gifts of secular knowledge and social knowledge can be made with fire and sword. But spiritual knowledge can only be given in silence like the dew that falls unseen and unheard, yet bringing into bloom masses of roses. This has been the gift of India to the world again and again. Whenever there has been a great conquering race bringing nations of the world together, making roads and transit possible, immediately India arose and gave her quota of spiritual power to the sum total of the progress of the world. This happened ages before

Buddha was born, and remnants of it are still left in China, Asia Minor, and in the heart of the Malayan Archipelago. This was the case when the great Greek conqueror united the four corners of the then known world; then rushed out Indian spirituality, and the boasted civilisation of the West is but the remnant of that deluge.” (Vol. 3, p. 222)

At the same time Swamiji warns us of the complacency that we must be alert about. In his address at the Rameswaran temple, he tells a funny story that poignantly indicates how ceremonial worship is often interpreted as devotion to God. He says, “A rich man had a garden and two gardeners. One of these gardeners was very lazy and did not work; but when the owner came to the garden, the lazy man would get up and fold his arms and say, ‘How beautiful is the face of my master,’ and dance before him. The other gardener would not talk much, but would work hard, and produce all sorts of fruits and vegetables which he would carry on his head to his master who lived a long way off. Of these two gardeners, which would be the more beloved of his master? Shiva is that master, and this world is His garden, and there are two sorts of gardeners here; the one who is lazy, hypocritical, and does nothing, only talking about Shiva’s beautiful eyes and nose and other features; and the other, who is taking care of Shiva’s children, all those that are poor and weak, all animals, and all His creation. Which of these would be the more beloved of Shiva? Certainly he that serves His children first. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children - must serve all creatures in this world first. It is said in the Shastras that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants.” (Vol. 3, p. 142)

In the lecture on ‘Future of India’, he speaks of certain national defects that must be changed in India. He says, “There is yet another defect in us. Ladies, excuse me. but through centuries of slavery, we have become like a nation of women. You scarcely can get three women together for five minutes in this country or any other country, and they quarrel. Women make big societies in European countries and make tremendous declarations of women’s power, and so on; then they quarrel, and some man comes and rules them all. All over the world they still require some man to rule them. We are like them. Women we are. If a woman comes to lead women, they all begin to immediately to criticise her, tear her to pieces, and make her sit down. If a man comes and gives them a little harsh treatment, scolds them now and then, it is all right, they have been used to that sort of mesmerism. The whole world is full of such mesmerists and hypnotists. In the same way, if one of our countrymen stands up and tries to become great, we all try to hold him down, but if a foreigner comes and tries to kick us, it is all right. ... So give up being a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote - this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race - “everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything.”... When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all other gods. Before we can crawl half a mile, we want to cross the ocean like Hanuman! It cannot be. Everyone going to be a Yogi, everyone going to meditate! It cannot be. The whole day mixing with the world with Karma Kanda, and in the evening sitting down and blowing through your nose! Is it so easy? Should Rishis come flying through the air, because you have blown through the nose? Is it a joke? It is all nonsense. What is needed is chittasuddhi, purification of the heart. And how does this come? The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat - of those all around us. Worship It. Worship

is the exact equivalent of the Sanskrit word, and no other English word will do. These are all our gods ... and the first gods we have to worship are our countrymen. These we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other. It is the most terrible Karma for which we are suffering, and yet it does not open our eyes.” (Vol. 3, p. 301)

These are tremendous statements. This lecture was delivered in 1897, and exactly 50 years later, India achieved independence from British rule. Swamiji was right. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi faced tremendous opposition from their own countrymen. Yet, keeping their minds fixed on the Virat, and treating the people as God, Gandhiji marched forth and freed India from foreign rule. Still much more needs to be done. Our minds have not been freed from foreign rule. That must change and in fact, I am happy to see, is changing as we speak.

So we find Swamiji saying, “Rouse yourselves, therefore, for life is short. There are greater works to be done than aspiring to become lawyers and picking quarrels and such things. A far greater work is the sacrifice of yourselves for the benefit of your race, for the welfare of humanity.” (The Future of India, Vol. 3, p. 304).

In his highly humorous and instructive essay entitled ‘The East and the West,’ Swamiji compares the Indian society with the West, noting both the good and bad points of both. He begins by saying, “Let us see about their respective ideas of cleanliness of the body. Purity means cleanliness of mind and body; the latter is effected by the use of water etc. No nation in the world is as cleanly in the body as the Hindu, who uses water very freely. Taking a plunge bath is wellnigh scarce in other nations, with a few exceptions. The English have introduced it into their country after coming into contact with India. Even now, ask of those of our students who have resided in England for education, and they will tell you how insufficient the arrangements for bathing are there. When the Westerners bathe - and that is once a week - they change their inner clothing. Of course, nowadays, among those who have the means, many bathe daily and among Americans the number is larger; the Germans once a week, the French and others very rarely! Spain and Italy are warm countries, but there is still less! Imagine their eating garlic in abundance, profuse perspiration day and night, and yet no bath! Ghosts must surely run away from them, what to say of men! What is meant by bath in the West? Why, the washing of face, head, and hands, that is, only those parts which are exposed. A millionaire friend of mine once invited me to come over to Paris: Paris, which is the capital of modern civilisation - Paris, the heaven of luxury, fashion, and merriment on earth - the center of arts and sciences. My friend accomodated me in a huge palatial hotel, where arrangements for meals were in a right royal style, but, for bath - well, no name of it. Two days I suffered silently - till at last I could bear it no longer, and had to address my friend thus: ‘Dear brother, let this royal luxury be with you and yours! I am panting to get out of this situation. Such hot weather, and no facility for bathing; if it continues like this, I shall be in imminent danger of turning mad like a rabid dog.’ Hearing this, my friend became very sorry for me and annoyed with the hotel authorities, and said, ‘I won’t let you stay here any more, let us go and find out a better place.’ Twelve of the chief hotels were seen, but no place for bathing was there in any of them. There are independent bathing houses, where one can go and



have a bath for four or five rupees. [In those days, four or five rupees means four or five dollars.] That very afternoon, I read in a paper that an old lady entered into the bath-tub and died then and there! I am inclined to think that perhaps that was the first occasion in her life to come in contact with so much water, and the frame collapsed by the sudden shock!" (Vol. 5, p. 472)

I think some of us who have travelled in Europe can testify that this is still true in many places. Maybe the big cities have changed but if we deviate from them, it is difficult to find a hotel room with a bath attached. When I was in Norway, there was only one bathroom for the entire floor of guests and that too was kept under lock and key. Whenever one wanted to use it, you had to go to the reception area and sign out the key!

To continue with Swamiji's humorous narration, he writes, in the section entitled 'Food and Cooking', 'Now hear something about the Western art of cooking. There is greater purity observed in our cooking than in any other country; on the other hand, we have not that perfect regularity, method and cleanliness of the English table. Every day our cook first bathes and changes his clothes before entering the kitchen; he neatly cleanses all the utensils and the hearth with water ... and if he chances to touch his face, nose or any part of his body, he washes his hand before he touches again any food. The Western cook scarcely bathes; moreover, he tastes with a spoon the cooking he is engaged in, and does not think much of redipping the spoon into the pot. Taking out his handkerchief he blows his nose vigorously, and again with the same hand he, perchance, kneads the dough. He never thinks of washing his hands when he comes from outside, and begins his cooking at once. But all the same, he has snow-white clothes and cap. Maybe, he is dancing on the dough - why, because he may knead it thoroughly well with the whole pressure of his body, no matter if the sweat of his brow gets mixed with it! (Fortunately nowadays, machines are widely in use for the task.) After all this sacrilege, when the bread is finished, it is placed on a porcelain dish covered with a snow-white napkin and is carried by the servant dressed in a spotless suit of clothes with white gloves on; then it is laid on the table spread over with a clean table-cloth. Mark here, the gloves - lest the man touches anything with his bare fingers!" (Vol. 5, p. 477)

If you think the Indians are spared from criticism, let us read the next paragraph. "Our Brahmin cook has first purified himself with a bath, and then cooked the dinner in thoroughly cleansed utensils, but he serves it to you on plate on the bare floor which has been pasted over with earth and cow-dung; and his cloth, albeit daily washed, is so dirty that it looks as if it were never washed. And if the plaintain-leaf, which sometimes serves the purpose of the plate, is torn, there is a good chance of the soup getting mixed up with the moist floor and cow-dung paste giving rise to a wonderful taste!" (Vol. 5, p. 477-478)

Leaving the humor of culture and customs aside, let me conclude with what I feel is the most powerful statement in the entire teaching of Swami Vivekananda. It occurs in his lectures on Jnana Yoga, 'God in Everything.' He writes, "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. And this ideal we must hear about as much as we can, till it enters into our hearts, into our brains, into our very veins, until it tingles in every drop of our blood and permeates every pore in our body." (Vol. 2, p. 152)

Here are some encouraging words: “It is thought which is the propelling force in us. Fill the mind with the highest thoughts, hear them day after day, think them month after month. Never mind failures; they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life, these failures. What would life be without them? It would not be worth having if it were not for struggles. Where would be the poetry of life? Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow - never a man. So never mind these failures, these little backslidings; hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.” (Vol. 2, p. 152)

Maybe I have been unfair to the cow in this lecture. It is often asked, what is the difference between a cow chewing cud and a human chewing gum? The answer is: the intelligent look on the cow’s face! In actuality, we are all a bunch of cows with our ‘cow universe’. And Sri Krishna is the Divine Cowherd! That is certainly better than being a bunch of sheep!

To conclude, let me say that it is fun to study the life of a realized being from this perspective. We are fortunate that in the case of Swami Vivekananda we have his exact words unaltered and we can glimpse his everyday life. His conversations convey his superb sense of humour. At the same time, they compress volumes of philosophy into a few jovial moments. Even his jokes inspires us towards the spiritual goal. May we all gain inspiration through this study and move faithfully towards our spiritual ideal. This is my prayer.