

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: A PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT MENTOR

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ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda has offered many fruitful ideas which are related to personality development. He advises the people to do things without expecting anything in return. He is in favour of giving because he believes that it will return in multiplication. He asks man not to be jealous and selfish. He inspires him to be obedient and faithful to the cause of truth, humanity and country. He exhorts him to have faith, stand up on that faith and be strong. Faith, dutifulness, compassion, good thoughts, character, non-attachment, helping nature, fearlessness, love, wisdom, spirituality, responsibility, truth, strength within, the company of the good etc. are some traits which are recommended by Vivekananda for personality development. Self-help is the foundation that makes the building of personality development strong and firm.

Keywords: *Personality, Spirituality, Illumination, Wisdom, Fearlessness, Non-attachment, Truth*

Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practice the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached. (*Personality Development* 87)

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The great secret is—absence of jealousy. Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate. That is the whole secret. Fight on bravely! Life is short! Give it up to a great cause. (*Personality Development* 51)

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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. Therefore, make your own future. (*Personality Development* 58)

These are the inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda, “a versatile personality—a personality that touched all shores of human life, not only by his prophetic appearance and gesture but equally by his conversational powers” (*Swami Vivekananda: Select Speeches* 138). Swami Vivekananda has offered many fruitful ideas which are related to personality development. The ideas related to personality development which have been culled from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* are present in a compilation, titled, *Personality Development*.

In the words of Cambridge International Dictionary of English, “your personality is the type of person you are, which is shown by the way you behave, feel and think.” Personality does not mean mere physical appearance of a person. It is the combination of all the aspects, including physical, spiritual, mental and professional. A man becomes what he

thinks. Thoughts, words, action and behaviour are the aspects which become filters for filtering a man's personality. Self-confidence, positive thinking, learning from others, self-reliance and selfless service are some features which are generally accepted as the ingredients of a good personality. It is really tragic that a man makes an outward journey but does not think of the inward journey even once. The moment he thinks of the inward journey and begins to move on the inner path, he is illumined. 'Know thyself' is the best way to judge others. The more one has the power to peep into one self, the more illumined he becomes.

What a man thinks leaves an impression on the mind. These impressions become responsible for the reaction or response to a given situation. Character is determined by the total impressions. It is the past which determines the present while it is the present which shapes or will shape the future. This is the key which governs the development of the personality. Personality development covers five dimensions which include physical dimension, energy dimension, mental dimension, intellectual dimension and blissful dimension. The body and senses make the physical dimension. Digestion of food, circulation of blood, respiration and other activities come in the category of energy dimension. Thinking, feeling and emotions etc. are the activities of the mind which can be included in the mental dimension. The determinative ability and will power can put under the intellectual dimension. Experiences which are felt during sleep are categorised in the blissful dimension. Hence, personality development becomes a kind of identification with the higher dimensions of personality. This sense of identification is not easy to achieve as its development comes out of struggle with the lower mind. This lower mind is replete with desires, old habits, wrong attitudes and bad impressions. Here the role of discrimination begins. The need is to identify with the higher mind. The more a man identifies himself with the higher mind, the more he develops his personality. For this he struggles against his old habits by cultivating good habits. If he comes out victorious out of this struggle, he becomes civilized and thus develops his character. Character is what counts. Character can do miracle what money, fame or learning can't. Thus, this struggle makes the divinity within visible.

It is really tragic that a man thinks that sense-happiness is the only aim of his life. The man who thinks that pleasure is the only goal is no better than an animal. The truth is that pleasure and happiness are temporary. This sense-pleasure becomes the cause of his misery. Even then he runs after such pleasure throughout his life. Misery teaches him more than happiness. Vivekananda says:

Sense-happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (*Jnana*) is the goal of all life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than this rational nature. So the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will come bliss. (*Personality Development 37*)

What is important is spiritual knowledge. Highest wisdom lies in this spiritual knowledge. It leads to the path of bliss. The other things are immaterial and mere shadows. As "Death lies in the senses" (*Personality Development 37*), Vivekananda never advises the youth to run after senses. Those who run after senses are fools.

A man is what he thinks. His thoughts motivate him to perform deeds. Deeds, whether good or bad determine joys or sorrows or pleasure or pain in life. The seeds of sin or virtue sprout in time and appear as punishment or reward accordingly. Hence, in this process, thought is important. A man's character is the result of his thinking process. His thoughts are the revelation of his will. Character is what a man thinks. His *karma* is interlinked somewhere with his thought and will. Vivekananda says:

All the actions that we see in the world, all the movements in human society, all the works that we have around us, are simply the display of thought, the manifestation of the will of man. Machines or instruments, cities, ships, or men-of-war, all these are simply the manifestation of the will of man; and this will is caused by character, and character is manufactured by *Karma*. As is *Karma*, so is the manifestation of the will. (*Personality Development* 41)

He is expected to do good deeds though “the road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe” (*Personality Development* 42). It is natural that those who move on the road of good have to face troubles and difficulties. Devils struggle in the heart but they should be thrown out by the fire of spirituality.

Man should do nothing rashly. He should think over it again and again. When he is sure, he should do it only then. He should think before doing any action. He should also be careful in his desires. What a man desires, he gets. When he gets, he comes in the grip of bondage. Vivekananda asks the youth to fill themselves with “the thought of almightiness, majesty and glory.” He advises them that all his actions should be “magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of thought” (*Personality Development* 48).

Vivekananda recommends the youth to acquire the feeling of non-attachment. It is the feeling of non-attachment which removes the difference of good and bad. Selfishness makes man attached and creates difference of good and bad. The feeling of non-attachment makes him to remain the same in all conditions. It does not matter if he is in good fortune or ill fortune. No one can control or use power over man without his permission. Vivekananda says: “Nothing has power over the Self of man, until the Self becomes a fool and loses independence. So, by non-attachment you overcome and deny the power of anything to act upon you” (*Personality Development* 117).

Concentration is necessary for success. It comes when a man takes one idea and then gives his hundred percent in making that idea successful. The way to success is not in thinking of many things or doing many things at one time. Rather success is in turning the idea into passion to the limit of living the very idea with full energy. ‘Focus on one idea’ has been the great mantra of every spiritualist. Hence, living the very idea and dreaming over it lead towards success. Vivekananda says:

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced. Others are mere talking machines. (*Personality Development* 107)

Vivekananda advises the people to do things without expecting anything in return. He is in favour of giving because he believes that it will return in multiplication. The mantra of giving is the mantra that makes a man real one. He says:

Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have to give; it will come back to you—but do not think of that now, it will come back multiplied a thousandfold—but the attention must not be on that. Yet have the power to give; give, and there it ends. Learn that the whole of life is giving, that nature will force you to give. So, give willingly. (*Personality Development* 74)

Vivekananda asks man not to be jealous and selfish. He inspires him to be obedient and faithful to the cause of truth, humanity and country. Jealousy is a curse. He exhorts saying:

Avoid jealousy and selfishness. Be obedient and eternally faithful to the cause of truth, humanity, and your country, and you will move the world. Remember it is the person, the life, which is the secret of power—nothing else...Jealousy is the bane of all slaves. It is the bane of our nation. Avoid that always. All blessings attend you and all success. (*Personality Development* 90)

A man is known by the company he keeps. He becomes good or bad because of his company. Anybody's character can be revealed if the company of the person is revealed. The continuous living in the company of good or bad creates impression on the mind. If a man lives in the company of bad people and hears them continuously, his mind pattern and thinking process will also become bad. Living in the bad company will result in bad action. He believes that "If a man continuously hears bad words, thinks bad thoughts, does bad actions, his mind will be full of bad impressions; and they will influence his thought and work without his being conscious of the fact" (*Personality Development* 40). A man becomes good or bad because of his impressions that he has in the company. Impressions if they are bad will excite him to do evil deeds. This is also true in case of good impressions. If a man lives in the company of good people, he will do 'good' in spite of his desire to do evil. Good character is established when a man who wants to do evil fails to do so and does 'good' instead.

Faith is the key that opens all the secrets of greatness. What a man needs is faith—faith in himself and faith in God. Vivekananda asks the youth to have faith, stand up on that faith and be strong. It is really deplorable that man has become weak. He needs strength. He need not weeping. He is to be a man. Vivekananda asks the youth to reject as poison if he finds anything that makes him weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually. He recommends Truth—truth which will make him strong from within.

Duty and love are complementary. No one wants to do duty. Duty works as friction. It can be performed only when love becomes grease for its wheels and makes it run smooth. Vivekananda says: "Duty is seldom sweet. It is only when love greases its wheels that it runs smoothly" (*Personality Development* 80). Duty becomes sweet when love is mixed with it. Man does not take the meaning of freedom in the right sense. It is not freedom to be a slave of passion or the senses. There are many petty things that occur in daily life and man becomes slave to all these petty things. But he is wrong in taking it as freedom. Rather it is bondage to be a slave to these petty things. It is love which never fails. It gets victory. Hence, man should love his fellow beings. Vivekananda advises the people to seek for God in the poor, the miserable and the weak. Love gives power and makes man omnipotent. Selflessness gives him charm. Character pays everywhere.

Vivekananda believes in the active actions, not in the passive ones. He knows the importance of physical exercise. Hence, he asks the youth to be "nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the *Gita*" (*Personality Development* 85). But it does not mean that he is against religion. Man with physical weakness cannot understand the *Gita*. Vivekananda says:

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. (*Personality Development* 85-86)

Failures are the pillars of success. If a man fails and holds others responsible for the failure, he is weak. Rather he should confess his own failures, faults and weaknesses without blaming others. The difference becomes clear when heads of the families who fail see some persons successful in managing the family. Hence, personality matters. “When heads of families fail, they should ask themselves, why it is that some persons manage a family so well and others do not. Then you will find that the difference is owing to the man—his presence, his personality” (*Personality Development*24).

No one is born weak or sinner. All are glorious children. The need is to instil the positive and strong thoughts into the brains of the children right from their childhood. No one should forget that all are the part of the Almighty. The truth is that God resides in heart of man. “I am He” is the song that a man should always remember even at the time of death. He should not seek strength or help from outside. True strength lies within him. The need is to “drive out the superstition that has covered mind” and so Vivekananda exhorts saying: “Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practice the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached” (*Personality Development*87). The message of fearlessness makes man advance like a hero. The human body will remain for a short period. It will perish with its happiness and misery. Then, why should man fear? The need is to reach the state of fearlessness. Faith, dutifulness, compassion, good thoughts, character, non-attachment, helping nature, fearlessness, love, wisdom, spirituality, responsibility, truth, strength within, the company of the good etc. are some traits which are recommended by Vivekananda for personality development. Self-help is the foundation that makes the building of personality development strong and firm. Vivekananda asks man not to be afraid and thus exhorts him saying: “Help thyself out by thyself. None else can help thee, friend. For thou alone art thy greatest enemy, thou alone art thy greatest friend. Get hold of the Self, then. Stand up. Don’t be afraid” (*Personality Development* 90).

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Bio:

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