

[Swami Unveils a New Resource on Vivekananda](#)

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While attending the Global Vision 2000 event held in Washington, D.C., August 6-8, Hinduism Today interviewed Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda of Karnataka, South India. Swamiji detailed the creation of his monumental work, *Vivekananda: A Comprehensive Study*, and spoke at length on the nature of religious service and how to be a better Hindu.

Hinduism Today: What inspired you to create this book?

Swami Jyotirmayananda: I met Mother Krishnabhai, who was instrumental in this humble work. She gave me the jist of the four yogas-karma, bhakti, raja and jnana-and I was very fond of it. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling our nature, internal and external. Do this either by work or worship, psychic control or philosophy-by one or more or all these-and be free. This is the whole of religion." This was the sum of Swami Vivekananda's teaching. Mother Krishnabhai put it in a simple language which was very appealing to me. I understand those teachings in the light of what she told me. And that is how I have been able to work. When I was as a lone, penniless sannyasin, going here and there, she provided financial assistance, unasked, which was very useful. On account of that financial help I could start. During my three years of wandering life, from 1977 to 1979, I prepared the brochure *Vivekananda Calls on You*. That developed into a big book. From 1980 I was totally engaged in this work. I worked in various libraries in Madras and elsewhere in South India. In 1985 I came to Kanyakumari's Vivekananda Kendra, where the entire thing was typed up. Actually, I was not knowing what shape it was going to be. But somehow, mysteriously, I found everything happened without my planning for it. And the work was over in 1985, after six years. A huge thing was done.

HT: How did you take up a religious life?

Swami: I was a student of the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangalore for about nine years, until I finished my college. After that, I was employed in Madras. In 1973, I was selected by Eknath Ranade as one of the first life-worker trainees of the Vivekananda Kendra. He sent me to different parts of the country for training, including looking after the office in Calcutta, and working in the editorial department of the Kendra Patrika.

In 1976 I took sannyas independently from Swami Vishuddhananda at the Ottappalam "Ramakrishna Ashram." This ashram was started by Swami Nirmalananda, also called Tulsi Maharaj, one of the 17 disciples of Ramakrishna. It is not recognized as a branch of the Ramakrishna mission, but it is the same tradition.

HT: How can we become more religious?

Swami: Actually, it is a question of need. What happens is, by getting knocked on the head in life, one day or another everyone opens his eyes and starts questioning the purpose of this life. Till then, everyone wants "to make hay while the sun shines." Nobody can be made spiritual overnight.

HT: How is liberation from rebirth achieved?

Swami: A bhaktar takes the name of the Lord. He repeats it with all love and devotion, being conscious that that is the name of the Lord who is within himself, who is within everyone and who is all-pervading. He reflects on the divine attributes. He takes His name wherever he goes so that hammering on his mind is, "He is everything, He is beyond everything."

Now, if this is really done sincerely, what happens is, it dawns on him that everything is Himself. There is nothing. God alone is. The body idea goes. He

becomes egoless. He attains surrender to God. Birth and death are no more because you have become one with the cosmic reality.

HT: What are the most common misunderstandings about karma?

Swami: It is a simple thing, action-reaction, avidya, kama, karma-ignorance, desire, action. Ignorance of our real nature makes us feel limited and want something. If we feel that we are everything, we are full. But then, due to ignorance of our real nature, we feel a sense of want, we feel lacking. We put forth effort. But, whatever we do with desire, it binds you. The same karma, when you do it as the Lord's service, unselfishly, out of love for him, that liberates you.

HT: What is the difference between karma and fate?

Swami: Fate means that if something happens you are helpless. No. By the law of karma, whatever I am is the result of what I have done. So that, naturally, gives us this understanding: what I want to be is a result of what I do. So, karma gives you full freedom to shape, make or mar your life. Each man is the architect of his own future. HT: How can parents help their children to be religious?

Swami: What they can do first is inculcate devotion into the children. They should have some Ishta Devata at home. Make the children repeat the name with all love and teach them how to prostrate before the elders. You repeat the name with the prayer that He should manifest in you. That way you teach the children. And if they really do this, then it flashes to them, though they may not realize it, whenever they see someone, "Oh, it is God in this form." So everyday they will be loving and kind to everyone. They become gentle, humble.

HT: How can Hindu organizations have more impact? Swami: Emphasize character formation. That means, feed them with moral and spiritual values. Inculcate them with those virtues and help them to form character. Make them kind, loving, devoted. Do not worry about the number. There was one Vivekananda. He did wonders.

Vivekananda: A Comprehensive Study, compiled and edited by Swami Jyotirmayananda, 137, Mount Road, Madras, 600 002, India. Available through Nataraja Books, 7073 Broomfield Plaza, Springfield, Virginia, 22150, USA. 842 p., US\$24.95.

This work is significant in that two objectives are beautifully achieved: nearly 200 pages of tributes to Vivekananda, and a 300-page chronicle of his life and times. Also included is a bouquet of sublime and soul-stirring thoughts of Swamiji, containing significant selections from his highly inspiring speeches and writings. The section titled Vivekananda on Education and Religion is a collection of writings by eminent authors. The Tributes section is certainly the most extensive to be found, nicely organized into four divisions: tributes from writers, monastics, savants and politicians. Vivekananda in Pictures includes 75 photographs, and there is an excellent index.

This book is a remarkable compilation of information. For example, we learn that in 1893, Paramahansa Yogananda was born, M.K. Gandhi sailed for Durban, Swami Vivekananda spoke at the Parliament of the World's Religions and Thomas Edison patented an electric locomotive. Because of this chronicle, one can easily perceive the diverse energies at play in the rampant growth of the industrial revolution and modern science, and the social changes that were brewing with Lenin, Marx and Stalin.

Perusing these 300 pages, one appreciates the importance of the editor's intent. "To provide a vista of the principal events in the life of Swami Vivekananda, and aid the reader in understanding Swamiji's historic environs and the forces which were moulding human consciousness during his period." Reviewed by Deva Rajan