

# **The Birth of a New Knowledge**



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May 2015

# I

## The crisis of Faith

Mankind has been built on faith

- faith, first, in the powers inherent in man
- faith, second, in the powers of nature
- faith, third, in the powers of an External Consciousness, a God Transcendent and a God Immanent who has created and controls the Universe.

Then came science, technology, and industry, a consequence of this three-fold faith.

Science broke down the faith in the existence of an External Consciousness and posited instead a Vast Universe meant to be studied and conquered by mankind.

Technology, the vast array of tools and methods developed by mankind helped man deal with and “conquer” Nature. With every victory, man’s faith in the powers of nature began declining and what emerged is a faith that technology can do almost anything including create intelligent man-like entities and, maybe in the future, create alternative environments that insulate us wholly from nature as we know it.

With technology came scale and the birth of vast industries, huge corporations and large scale vehicles of human organization that could influence and control almost every part of an individual’s life – politics, media, economics, stock markets, consumer goods – in short, almost every dimension of a modern human being’s life.

Thus, the rise of science and technology, has led in past centuries to an increase in mankind's faith in itself and a concomitant loss of faith in the power of Nature or on an External Divinity.

At the same time, has come a sense of a world far more complex, far more interconnected and intercausal, than any individual or even group of individuals and perhaps even all mankind can probably understand leave alone control or manage.

This paradoxically has begun breaking mankind's faith in its own powers as it grapples with a world that is essentially "out of control" and even "out of comprehension".

As this paradox begins to reveal itself fully, mankind is suddenly faithless – without faith in an intelligent benevolent nature, without faith in in Nature's powers and Her own inner logic, and without faith in its own ability to comprehend or manage the world effectively.

In this moment of crisis for mankind, there is the need for discovering what has hitherto been undiscovered by the vast majority – a new source of Intelligence, Knowledge, and Wisdom that could offer mankind not only faith, but also hope – both in its own future as a species and in the future of each individual who seeks to live and grapple with the world around us.

## II

### A new Knowledge

This new source of Intelligence, Knowledge and Wisdom is not new. It has been known to the ancient sages living in India for centuries. It has been kept alive in the sacred lore of great spiritual lineages in India. If it has reached the populace at large, it has done so in the form of abstruse verses, pithy axioms, and secret “mantras” – words of power that were neither accessible physically, nor accessible intellectually.

As a result, the population of India lost faith in that knowledge – faith in its power to transform their destiny. Thus, this Knowledge remained confined to a select few.

When the West reached India and encountered this Knowledge – it did so in conditions those were unfortunate. The Westerners were glorious conquerors with a ‘successful’ civilization, at the peak of their faith in themselves, and their faith in science and technology.

The Indians – especially the keepers of this Knowledge – were poor (if peaceful), certainly powerless, and unable to articulate this knowledge in a language and in methods familiar to the conquerors.

Thus, this Knowledge became discredited and was treated as inferior to the methods and approaches of the conquerors.

It was at this time that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda emerged – a Guru and Disciple – who together did something profound and extraordinary. Sri Ramakrishna, the Guru, was an unlettered Hindu Brahmin priest, unfamiliar with the scientific language of the West and, yet free of the pedantry and abstruse nitpicking of scriptural experts in India.

Sri Ramakrishna engaged with this Knowledge, not as abstract theory, but as Living Practice. The verses, He saw not as some ancient ramblings to be needlessly memorized but as methods and pathways to a vast source of Knowledge, Power, Divinity, Peace and Joy.

He engaged with this Knowledge through experimentation and personal discovery. Through these experiments he threw away all that was inessential – all the encrustations of centuries of mindless theory and isolated, once more, the core principles, constructs, models for action, and most important the ideals – the maps of becoming – which human beings could use to transform themselves into becoming more than who they were!

These “Realizations” were the very essence of a whole subcontinent's heritage dating back thousands of years.

And these “Realizations”, he made available in total to his disciple the great Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda called this body of knowledge, revived and cleansed of all inessentials, Vedanta – a term derived from the original term used to describe the abstruse verses and insights collected in the ancient Upanishads.

This Knowledge, Swami Vivekananda, cast wide open, in a modern language, in terms intelligent to people schooled in Western Methods and Modes of thoughts.

And with this Knowledge, Swami Vivekananda added a second message – a plaintive cry to his fellowmen both in India and outside India, that they recognize and engage with this Knowledge, and leverage this Knowledge to transform Human Destiny.

### III

## A message from Vivekananda

And what is this Knowledge that Swami Vivekananda talks about? The message of Vedanta is that each of us – each individual human being on planet earth – is potentially Divine. Each one of us has infinite possibilities – not just in the sense of capabilities and special mental powers – but in the sense of our infinite capacity to evolve as human beings.

In short, Swami Vivekananda – and his message of Vedanta – offers the promise of infinite evolution not on the physical or biological dimension but in the measures of intellect, character, social and personal engagements, our capacity for peace, harmony, self-esteem, mental strength, etc.

This message of human evolution – let me call it “evolution of self” rather than biological evolution – is the new Knowledge that mankind today needs. And when mankind learns to develop faith in this Knowledge then it will move away from its paradigms of power and acquisition to new paradigms of enablement and personal and social transformation as the foundations of social growth and prosperity to the human race.

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Srinivas Venkatram is the founder of Illumine – an “ideas in action” Lab that focuses on translating Swami Vivekananda’s ideas into new social, institutional and educational models.

Illumine’s projects and interventions have reached more than 2 million users/ beneficiaries in society.

He offers one interpretation of Vivekananda’s ideas (knowing fully well that alternative interpretations which are equally valid can be, and have been offered by individuals more qualified in this area of thought).

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