

# Unpublished Lecture of Swami Vivekananda at the Barber's— Vedanta: The Soul

Swami Narasimhananda

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA FAMOUSLY SAID: 'I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.'<sup>1</sup> It was this message that he kept on giving in various forms and hues and it is this message that resonates across the world even today though distanced by more than a century in time. There are numerous accounts of various talks, lectures, interviews, and other details of Swamiji hidden in some unknown recesses of this world, waiting to be read or heard by the world.

During the last century, countless researchers have laboriously toiled day and night to unearth valuable bits of information regarding the life and message of Swamiji. One such information has surfaced during gleanings of American newspapers of the 1890s. It pertains to a lecture Swamiji gave in New York. We find mention of this lecture in his biography: 'In February and March [1895], he lectured twice on "The Vedanta Philosophy" at the home of a Mrs. A. L. Barber at 871 Fifth Avenue. These two lectures (to which the Swami referred in a letter as "the Barber House lectures") constituted parts of a heterogeneous lecture series given under the auspices of Mrs. Ole Bull and were more or less private and



Swami Vivekananda in New York

invitational.<sup>2</sup> The letter referred to here was written to Mrs Ole Bull on 25 April 1895 from 54 W. 33rd Street, New York, where Swamiji says: 'The day before yesterday I received a kind note from Miss Farmer including a cheque for a hundred dollars for the Barber House lectures.'<sup>3</sup>

We get further information of these lectures from Marie Louise Burke who quotes the programme from the 'Printed Barber House Announcement' obtained from the *Sara Chapman Bull Papers*:

Meanwhile, Swamiji had given other outside talks. There had been, for instance, the lecture course at the large house of Mr. and Mrs. Amzi Lorenzo Barber on Fifth Avenue at Sixty-eighth Street, which was sponsored by Mrs. Bull and which consisted of five lectures—two by Swamiji, two by Mrs. Florence Adams, and one by Mrs. Ernest Fenollosa, the well-known connoisseur and curator of Oriental art. Except for lending her spacious and, it was said, handsome drawing rooms for this series, Mrs. Barber seems to have had little to do with it. To judge from the following invitational announcement, it had been Miss Farmer and Miss Thursby who (in consultation with Mrs. Bull) had organized the series, and Mrs. Bull who presided over it:

Three weeks spent at Greenacre, Eliot, Maine, during August, 1894, suggested to Mrs. Ole Bull of Cambridge, Mass., the benefit of lectures combined with classes.

The success of these lectures given in December at Cambridge under her auspices led

Sarah Farmer (1847–1916)



her to consent to preside over a similar course in New York.

Through the courtesy of Mr. And Mrs. A. L. Barber, these lectures will be given at their residence, 871 Fifth Avenue.

On receipt of an acceptance and five dollars (addressed to Miss Farmer, in care of Miss Emma Thursby, 34 Gramercy Park), a ticket of admission will be forwarded to those desiring to attend this course. A prompt response is requested, that the waiting list may be supplied.

In connection with these lectures, classes and private lessons on the following subjects will be given. Those desiring to attend can arrange hours and terms with Miss Farmer.

Classes may begin February 18.

Mrs. Milward Adams:

*The Study of Expression.*

Miss Emma Thursby:

*Musical Expression and Phrasing.*

The Swami Vivekananda:

*The Vedanta Philosophy.*

#### PROGRAM

February 23, 8 p.m.—Mrs. Milward Adams of Chicago.

*Orderly Thought and Personal Culture.*

February 28, 3 p.m.—The Swami Vivekananda of India.

*The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul.*

March 4, 3 p.m.—Mrs. Milward Adams of Chicago.

*The Conversational Voice and its Possibilities.*

March 7, 8 p.m.—The Swami Vivekananda of India.

*The Vedanta Philosophy: God.*

March 9, 8 p.m.—Mr. Ernest F. Fenollosa of the Art Museum, Boston.

*Art as Related to Religion.*

Music: Miss Emma Thursby and Other Artists.

871 Fifth Avenue.

According to a report in the social columns



of a New York newspaper, Mrs. Ole Bull, 'a delicate, sweet-voiced woman with a tender, dreamy face and masses of dark hair', introduced Mrs. Milward Adams to the audience. One can infer that she introduced Mr. Fenollosa and Swamiji as well, but this, together with the above announcement and program (which was repeated in part in the society news), is all we know at present about Swamiji's two 'Barber House' lectures, for which he received, almost two months after giving the second one, a check for \$100 from Miss Farmer. As for the related classes and private lessons mentioned in the announcement, we have no further information about them.<sup>4</sup>

We find Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, a biographer of Mrs. Ole Bull, mention about these lectures:

In March, Sara organised a series of lectures at the home of Mrs. Barber on fashionable Fifth Avenue in New York, while Mrs. Barber was on occasion. *The New York World* reported on March 5 1985:

'The Conversational Voice and Its Possibilities' was the subject of the lecture given yesterday by Mrs. Milward Adams of Chicago, at the residence of Mrs. A. L. Barber, No. 871 Fifth Avenue. The lecturer was introduced by Mrs. Ole Bull, who with Mrs. Emma Thursby and Miss Farmer, is managing a course of Lenten lectures.

*The Sunday Tribune* reported on May 10: 'On Monday Mrs. Ole Bull, a delicate, sweet-voiced woman with a slender, dreamy face and masses of dark hair, introduced Mrs. Adams.' Mrs. Adams was a protégé of Emma's. At the Barber house lectures, Vivekananda met Miss Corbin, who invited him to give a parlour lecture at her house.<sup>5</sup>

Recently however, we have come across a hitherto unpublished newspaper account of the lecture 'The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul' that Swamiji gave on 28 February 1895.

Asim Chaudhuri has something more to add about the lectures Swamiji gave at the Barber's:

The *New York Times* did not bother to follow Swamiji's lectures, classes, and talks in the city on a regular basis, but they did on a few occasions. One such was the lecture course at the large house of Mr. and Mrs. Amzi Lorenzo Barber at 871 Fifth Avenue. (A new high-rise building bearing the numbers 871, 872, and 873 stands at the southeast corner of Sixty-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue where the Barber house once stood.) On February 28, the following announcement appeared in the *New York Times*:

Lecture at Mr. and Mrs. Barber's.—Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Barber will hold the second [first one was by Mrs. Milward Adams of Chicago on February 23 titled: 'Orderly Thought and Personal Culture'] of their series of 'Afternoon and Evening Talks' at their home, 871 Fifth Avenue, this afternoon at 3 o'clock. The Swami Vivekananda of India will talk on 'The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul'. The remaining lectures will be: 'The Conversational Voice and Its Possibilities', by Mrs. Milward Adams of Chicago,

Sara Chapman Bull (1850–1911)



on March 4; ‘The Vedanta Philosophy: God’, by the Swami Vivekananda of India on March 7; ‘Art as Related to Religion’, by Ernest F. Fenollosa of the Art Museum, Boston, on March 9. Tickets for the course may be had of Miss Emma Thursby of 34 Gramercy Park.

On March 1, the *New York Times* published a short report on Swamiji’s lecture:

Lecture on Vedanta Philosophy—The second of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Barber’s series of ‘Afternoon and Evening Talks’ was held at their home, 871 Fifth Avenue, yesterday afternoon. The Swami Vivekananda of India was the lecturer, her [*sic*] subject being ‘The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul’. The rooms and hall were filled with a large number of people interested in the lectures, which are under the management of Mrs. Ole Bull. Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Lawton, Miss Emma Thursby, J. Baxter Upham, M. Banner, the Rev. Charles H. Eaton, Mrs. George B. Loring, Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, Mrs. Adams, Peter Marle, Mrs.

Lanier, Dr. and Mrs. Philmore Moore, Mrs. Charles Lynde, and Miss Corbin. Miss Anthon sang, accompanied by James M. Wilson.

On March 8, they had a still shorter report on Swamiji’s March 7 lecture:

The Vedanta Philosophy—The last lecture on ‘The Vedanta Philosophy’, by Swami Vivekananda of India, was given last evening at the home of Mrs. A. L. Barber, 871 Fifth Avenue. About 200 persons were present. Miss Thurston [Thursby?] sang several songs. Mrs. Barber has kindly given her parlors for Saturday night, when Ernest F. Fenollosa of the Boston Art Museum will talk on ‘Art as Related to Science’.

That must have been some parlor that accommodated 200 people! The size of the parlor, however, did not reflect the size of Mrs. Barber’s heart. Two months after giving the ‘Barber House’ lectures, Swamiji received a check for meager \$100 from Miss Farmer. At fifty cents per person per lecture, a reasonable charge for Fifth Avenue parlor talks, his two lectures there should have netted him \$200. If Mrs. Bull hadn’t managed the lecture series, one would think Mrs. Barber had pulled a ‘Henry L. Slayton’ on Swamiji.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, the reference here is to the owner of Slayton Lecture Bureau who had duped Swamiji and did not properly give him the proceeds of his many lectures conducted under a contract with them.

Gopal Stavig gives further information regarding these lectures: ‘A Universalist clergyman in New York City (1881–1902), Reverend Charles H. Eaton (1852–1902) attended Swamiji’s discourse on “The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul” at Amzi Barber’s home on February 28, 1895. The arrangements were made by Sara Bull.’<sup>7</sup> He says further: ‘After Swamiji came to New York City in 1895, Mary (Elizabeth) Mapes Dodge (1831–1905) took an active interest in his classes. The *New York Times* (March 3, 1895, p. 8) mentions

Emma Thursby (1845–1931)





that she attended Vivekananda's class on the "Vedanta Philosophy", held at the residence of the wealthy Amzi Barber' (378). He adds:

At the residence of the wealthy Amzi L. Barber, Miss Rose Anthon sang on the occasion of Vivekananda's talk on 'Vedanta Philosophy' before a high-class New York audience on February 28, 1895. This is probably the singing actress Rose Reinhardt Anthon. ... Also in attendance at Amzi Barber's house for Swamiji's talk was Baxter Upham (1820-1902), the president of the Boston Music Hall Association (1854-84), the chairman of the committee on music in the Boston Public Schools (1857-72), and the chairman of the Handel and Haydn Society (1860-70)'(456-7).

Stavig gives detailed information about Amzi L Barber:

Swamiji twice gave a talk as the guest speaker at the residence of Amzi Barber (1843-1909) on Fifth Avenue at Sixty-eighth Street in New York City. Sara Bull sponsored the event for February-March 1895. Amzi Lorenzo Barber, a man of a kindly disposition and indomitable energy, had been a professor of natural philosophy at the African American Howard University in Washington, D.C. for four years (1868-72). He later left that to enter into the business world. By 1896 Barber's Asphalt Company had laid one-half of the asphalt pavement in the United States. According to the *New York Times*, Emma Thursby, Mary Mapes Dodge, Florence Adams, and Miss Anna Corbin were present for the occasion at the wealthy Amzi Barber's house in New York City. Swami Vivekananda spoke on 'The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul' before a sizeable group of select people from various backgrounds.

Also, in attendance at the Barber residence for Swamiji's talk were, according to the *New York Times*, the following people: Dr. Fillmore Moore (1856-1928), William Henry Lawton (b. 1853), and Peter Marie (1825-1903). Dr. Moore was a physician from New York who replaced Lewis Janes as the director of Monsalvat School

**LECTURE AT MRS. BARBER'S.**

**The Swami Vivekananda Talked on the Vedanta Philosophy.**

Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Barber entertained their friends yesterday at their home, No. 871 Fifth avenue, in a charming and unique manner. A lecture on the "Vedanta Philosophy-Soul" was given by the Swami Vivekananda, of Calcutta, India, who first came into prominence as a representative of the Vedanta philosophy at the Congress of Religions at the World's Fair.

After the singing of a French ballad, "Esperance et Foi," by Miss Anthon, the Swami Vivekananda was introduced in a graceful little speech by Mrs. Ole Bull, under whose auspices the lecture was given.

The Swami, who is a high caste Brahmin, announced himself as not representing any one sect of religion, but as an exponent of "Truth."

"I have not come here," he said, "to preach any special religion, but to teach Truth. Zoroaster, Mahomet and Christ had no name for their doctrine. Each taught the grand truth of their age, of all ages, and left their followers to find a name for it, and the principal of truth is the same in all religions.

"I believe in a unity of religions, and I also believe that the Vedanta Philosophy is broad enough to embrace all."

The Swami's definition of the soul is as follows: "The soul is a circumference without beginning or end, whose centre is located in the body. The soul is naturally free, unbound, pure and perfect; but has, in some way, got bound to matter and thinks itself matter, and now requires many existences to free itself. It must go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth, from death to death, like a tiny boat in a tempest; now floating on the top of a wave, now battling in the trough of the sea, but at last reaching the harbor in safety. And this must go on until perfection is reached, when the soul bursts its bonds and is absorbed into the Supreme Godhead.

"When I speak of the Vedas," the Swami continued, "I do not wish to be understood as referring to just so many books; for the Vedas, in the most liberal sense, do not simply mean the 108 Hindoo books, but rather the accumulated treasury of all spiritual laws discovered by different men of different ages."

The Swami wore the native costume of bright scarlet and spoke in an earnest and impressive manner.

Mrs. Barber wore a magnificent costume of violet velvet and silk and was assisted in receiving her guests by Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Emma Thursby.

Among those present were Mrs. E. E. L. Woodward, of Chicago; Mrs. Underhill Johnson, the Rev. Robert Collyer, and Prof. Jane, President of the Ethical Society, of Brooklyn.



THE WORLD: FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 1895.

**GRANDER TO GO TO PRISON**  
A Chief of the Pireling Gang Court-martialed of Arson in Forty Minutes.

**FAMILY REMOVED FROM COURT**  
He and Mrs. Latham are to be Court-martialed by Judge Martin This Morning.

**ARRESTED MANAGER FEELS COMPLIMENTED**  
For His Work in Saving St. Nicholas from the Claws of the Fire.

St. Nicholas, one of the oldest of the kind of houses that are to be seen in the city, was saved from the flames of the fire which broke out in the morning of the 28th of February. The building, which was owned by the late John A. Latham, was saved from the flames of the fire which broke out in the morning of the 28th of February. The building, which was owned by the late John A. Latham, was saved from the flames of the fire which broke out in the morning of the 28th of February. The building, which was owned by the late John A. Latham, was saved from the flames of the fire which broke out in the morning of the 28th of February.



GRANDER, THE CONVICTED FIRE MAN, AND HIS FAMILY DURING A RECESS.

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**A SHORT-TOUR-TRIP**  
The case of the late John A. Latham, who was court-martialed of arson in forty minutes.

**THE DUMP TO BE REMOVED**  
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**Campanini**  
VIN MARIANI  
The Nervous Man  
Should Know About Cottolene.

**Fleshy People Grateful.**  
Many Have Been Cured.

**Now on Exhibition**  
AT THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY  
CHICKERING PLANOS  
DEAFNESS

**Chickering Square**  
GOWPERTHWAIT  
51 WALL ST. N.Y.

Swami Vivekananda's Lecture published in Newspaper 'The World' from New York on Friday, 1 March 1895.

of Comparative Religions during 1900–03. Before 1904 Moore was a lecturer at the Concord School of Philosophy and at Professor Davidson's School in Farmington, Connecticut, a trustee of the Greenacre Fellowship in Eliot, Maine, in 1911, and director of the Edgewood School in Greenwich, Connecticut (1919–25). William Henry Lawton was the four times publicly elected street commissioner and city engineer for the city of Newport, Rhode Island. Peter Marie was a wealthy New York art collector. When he died, two-hundred and eighty-six of Marie's miniature paintings (two-inch round of ivory), many of upper class women, became the property of the New York Historical Society (512–3).

We find an announcement of this lecture in the *New York Tribune* of 24 February 1895:

MRS. OLE BULL'S LECTURE COURSE

A series of discourses, under the auspices of Mrs. Ole Bull, was begun last evening at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Barber, No. 871 Fifth-ave. The course will be continued as follows: February 28, 3 p.m., the Swami Vivekananda of India, 'The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul'; March 4, 3 p.m., Mrs. Milward Adams, of Chicago, 'The Conversational Voice and Its Possibilities'; March 7, 8 p.m., the Swami Vivekananda of India, 'The Vedanta Philosophy: God'; March 9, 8 p.m., Ernest F. Fenollosa, of the Art Museum, Boston, 'Art as Related to Religion.'

In connection with these lectures, class and private lessons will be given by Mrs. Milward Adams, in the study of expression; by Miss Emma Thursby, musical expression and phrasing, and by the Swami Vivekananda, in the Vedanta philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Another announcement of these lectures is found in the *New York Herald* of 24 February 1895:

At the large mansion of Mrs. A. L. Barber, No. 871 Fifth avenue, will be given a series of afternoon and evening talks—the first of which began last evening—by Mrs. Milward Adams, of Chicago; the Swami Vivekananda, of India, and by Mr.

Ernest F. Fenollosa, of the Art Museum, Boston.

The subject of the second lecture, which will occur Thursday afternoon at three o'clock, will be the 'Vedanta Philosophy: Soul', delivered by Swami Vivekananda.

The others occur March 4 at three o'clock, subject, 'The Conversational Voice and Its Possibilities', by Mrs. Milward Adams March 7. At eight o'clock, the 'Vedanta Philosophy: God'; March 7, at eight P. M., 'Art, as Related to Religion', by Mr. Fenollosa.

Pleasant Incidentals will be music by Miss Emma Thursby, and others.<sup>9</sup>

At last, we have got an account of the lecture 'The Vedanta Philosophy: Soul' given on 28 February 1895 from *The New York World*:

Lecture at Mrs. Barber's.

The Swami Vivekananda's Talked [*sic*] on the Vedanta Philosophy.

Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Barber entertained their friends yesterday [*sic*] at their home, No. 871 Fifth avenue, in a charming and unique manner. A lecture on the 'Vedanta Philosophy-Soul' was given by the Swami Vivekananda, of Calcutta, India, who first came into prominence as a representative of the Vedanta philosophy at the Congress of Religions at the World's Fair.

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'I have not come here,' he said, 'to preach any special religion, but to teach Truth. Zoroaster, Mahomet and Christ had no name for their doctrine. Each taught the grand truth of their age, of all ages, and left their followers to find a name for it, and the principal [*sic*] of truth is the same in all religions.



'I believe in a unity of all religions, and I also believe that the Vedanta Philosophy is broad enough to embrace all.'

The Swami's definition of the soul is as follows: 'The soul is a circumference without beginning or end, whose centre is located in the body. The soul is naturally free, unbound, pure and perfect; but has, in some way, got bound to matter and thinks itself matter, and now requires many existences to free itself. It must go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth, from death to death, like a tiny boat in a tempest; now floating on the top of a wave, now battling in the trough of the sea, but at last reaching the harbor in safety. And this must go on until perfection is reached, when the soul bursts its bonds and is absorbed into the Supreme Godhead.'

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Mrs. Barber wore a magnificent costume of violet velvet and silk and was assisted in receiving her guests by Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Emma Thursby.

Among those present were Mrs. E. E. L. Woodward of Chicago; Mrs. Underhill Johnson, the Rev. Robert Collyer, and Prof. Jane, President of the Ethical Society, of Brooklyn.<sup>10</sup>

This lecture resembles several others given by Swamiji in style and substance. A quotation that he often refers to and has been wrongly understood by many to be his own reads thus in original: 'God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.' We get the details of the source of this quotation from a researcher:

Empedocles (ca. 490–30 BC) was a Greek pre-Socratic philosopher ... The quote was first reference to Empedocles in the 14th century text *Liber Hermetis*, on the teachings of Hermes Treismegistus. God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere. 'Deus est circulus cuius centrum est ubique, circumferential vero nusquam.' In the form 'Deus est sphaera infinita' (God is an infinite sphere) also comes from the *Liber Hermetis, Liber Termegisti*, Cod. Paris. 6319 (14th cent.); Cod. Vat. 3060 (1315). The quotation is also attributed to Pascal, Voltaire, St. Augustine, Hermes Treismegistus, Nicholas Cusanus, Meister Eckhart and Carl Jung.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, we find the first detailed account of the lecture of Swamiji at the Barber's. 

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8. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1895-02-24/ed-1/seq-12/>> accessed 04 June 2015.
9. <<http://tinyurl.com/nthafez>> accessed 04 June 2015.
10. *The New York World*, 1 March 1895; <<http://tinyurl.com/ojjwy2t>> accessed 04 June 2015.
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