

## RELIGION OF MAN

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Modern *Man* is so self-conceited that he considers it sheer waste of time to pause and think what he is, what this universe (of which he is just a part) is, and what relation he has with the Creator of this universe? These are all fundamental questions. So long as man refuses to think accurately over these things he cannot build a safe, strong, and sure edifice for his thoughts that can give him a clear perception of the goal towards which he must move. Because of this lack of understanding over the fundamentals of life itself, man has created more problems for himself than he has solved. Never was there such longing for world peace as today. In spite of the achievements in the scientific and other fields of human knowledge, man has failed to preserve his own dignity and integrity. Man's 'inhumanity' towards man still makes countless thousands miserable. It must be brought home to man that he is essentially a *Spiritual* being and that a society based on a materialistic conception of the universe is, like an inverted cone, in unstable equilibrium. Spiritual values alone give meaning and purpose to human life.

Man's life should be viewed as a whole. It is wrong to divide it into different compartments such as religious, social, political, and economic, as if each compartment is independent of the other. It is often said that religion is a personal matter between man and his Maker. And it is also said that a *Secular State* has nothing to do with religion. Both these views are fallacious. Religion is not purely a 'private' affair. One is just on the path of religion when one begins to act in an impersonal way. Religion is and always shall be a *Vital fact* in man's life. A secular state will not be a *Truly* welfare State if its energies are not directed towards the raising of the spiritual solidarity and the moral tone of the people it governs. The destiny of *Nations* has over centred round the *Character* of individual men and women. Demoralization and degradation of character have preceded *Disintegration* of every civilization. A student of history knows that all the wealth and power of Western civilization did not save degenerate Rome. *Character* is the essence of *Religion*.

## Essential Unity of All Religions

What is man's religion ? In answer to this question we find numerous *Faith* and *Philosophies* prevalent in the different communities of mankind. Just as Nature everywhere is *One*, but there is *Diversity* in it, even so Humanity throughout the world is one although every man differs from the others both in thought and conduct. In spite of this obvious diversity, we find that it is a common but powerful desire of man to conform to a particular mode of behaviour in the world. Incarnations, saints, prophets, seers, and sages have appeared in different parts of the world from time to time in order to teach men *How to behave in harmony* with the underlying spirit of the *Cosmos*. These great souls, on the basis of personal experience, expounded the essential ideas and values in life and taught how these can be achieved. Their spiritual thought and teachings from the subject-matter of the scriptures and philosophies of the different *Fiths*. In addition to their moral and spiritual teachings, almost all the religious teachers and reformers of the world gave out a plan and a system of their own on which human society would best be organized. It was thus that every faith helped to establish customs and conventions, with rites and rituals, amongst the communities of mankind and gave birth to a particular type of civilization and culture which naturally differed from the others.

Although everyone, after studying the scriptures of the various faiths, can find out for oneself the essential unity underlying them all, the differences in their respective customs and conventions also become equally patent and obvious. For this reason, we often find that the followers of one faith harbour feelings of hatred towards those of other faiths. Every man considers his own religion to be not only right but superior to those of others. If a man, leaving aside the difference due to customs and conventions, were to try to grasp and live up to those spiritual truths that are essential to him for reaching the ultimate goal *Which is common to all humanity*, he is bound to love and extend full tolerance towards the followers of other faiths. Every religion, no matter of whatever label, can take man to this common goal. Therefore, all those who fight in the name of religion do not, in fact, understand what religion is. They stultify themselves by becoming victims of their one selfish, sectarian, and bigoted thoughts and actions. Man should ever

remember that he is a member of the *Human family first* and foremost and thereafter a follower of this or that religion. Religion is the *Way of life* that leads man to his ultimate goal. Since there is *Uniformity* in the *Spiritual teachings of all religions*, it is up to man to act in accordance with them in his life. Human life is replete with experiences—both good and bad—which go to make up man's fund of knowledge. Religion too is a matter of experience, resulting in the consciousness of the **Highest Truth** in which all that exists finds its ultimate refuge.

### Three Fundamental Principles

If one probes into the ultimate Truth one will find that the essential teachings of all religions are the same, though they have been expressed in different words. This Truth is the true Religion of *Man*. Its foundations have been laid on the following three fundamental principles:

(1) Be good and do good—this will make for *Character*.

(2) Develop non-attachment and unselfishness—this will make for *Personality*. An *integral* personality has to be built up on the sound foundation of *Self-sacrifice*.

(3) To acquire Supreme Knowledge is man's highest privilege; in fact, it is his ultimate goal. This will give him *Freedom*; it will make him *One* with the all-informing universal Spirit, also called 'God'.

To acquire such knowledge is to develop that consciousness in man which alone can give him a complete answer to the *Whys* and *Wherefores* of life on earth, viz. why a man takes birth and what is his ultimate goal? This will also solve for man the mystery of God and creation.

The above principles can be briefly amplified as under :-

'To work you have a right but not to the fruit thereof', because you have no control over the latter. Man is free to act; he can act as he likes, but the fruit of his actions is not in his hands or within his power. Actions of one individual react on the actions of other individuals and *vice versa*. The inevitable effect of action and reaction is always there and willy-nilly we are mutually affected by it. Man's actions do not cease to be effective till they have borne fruit. No power of Nature can stop an action from bearing its fruit. There are some actions which bear fruit instantaneously. If the hand is put into the fire it will get burnt.

There are other actions which bear fruit after a period of time has elapsed. When a man takes physical exercise its fruit will result after some time. Even so it is possible that we may not get the fruit of many of our actions in our present life and have to reap them in our next life. Just as the wind, on its onward march from one place to another, takes with it the resultant of both the sweet and bad odours through which it has passed, in the same manner a man's *Ego*, at the time of death, leaves the physical body, taking with it the final outcome of his thoughts, actions, experiences, and will, acquired during the life that has just ended enter another body and start on a new chapter of life's journey with the former life's character-load as the starting point.

### **The way to Right Action**

Man and his actions are inseparable. Man must work in order to live. But how ? A man should work without any selfish motive. He should be as self-less in his conduct as possible. This will help him in developing non-attachment. Selfless work is that which a man does without any motive of selfish and personal profit. All actions which go to gratify the 'I-ness' or the finite individuality of man are doubtless selfish. When man is deluded by the selfish thoughts of 'I' and 'mine', he becomes a slave to lust, anger and greed which impel him to commit the meanest of actions. The thought of depriving others of all wealth and power and bringing them under his possession, will dominate his whole life. But selfless service connotes impersonal action. In doing such impersonal action man sees his own good in the good of others. By working in this spirit he identifies himself with all other beings of the universe and does not consider the reality of their existence apart from himself. On the other hand, he feels that like all other beings he too is a part and parcel of the universe as a whole. Therefore, whatever action contributes to the good of the whole becomes a right action for him. Every action of his is done for the good of the whole and not for his personal individual self.

### **Who is the Doer of Action ?**

Man being the essential part of Nature, works according to the nature within him. The soul of man, embodied in a human form, apparently limited by the initial character-load and the chain of individual experiences ordained by the Law of Karma (or the law of Cosmic Moral Order which affirms "as man sows so he reaps") strives to realize, during

the course of several lives, the *Real state* of its *Oneness* with the *Pure soul*. Man's nature no doubt influences his body and mind in accordance with the character-load with which he starts on his life's journey. But his mind is endowed with such wonderful powers of discrimination and dispassion that through his own strong will he can subdue his lower nature and refuse to allow the mind to become its slave. Man is *Divine* and is not confined to his body and mind alone. He partakes of the *Infinite*. Religion embraces the whole of life which is consecrates and realizes as a revelation of the *Divinity* in man. It is the form and substance of the highest type of life of which man is capable.

### **Duty and Service**

It is through action that man reveals his *True self*. All action is *Duty*, for it must be performed. But one ought not to do any work under a sense of *Compulsion*. All work should be done with the conviction that it will do good to the whole of humanity. Let duties be sweetened with all-embracing love. One should be earnest in whatever one does and should not give any place to self-interest. Man should work for work's sake. This will make him unselfish. An action which is done under a sense of compulsion is devoid of free will, and a certain sense of pain results from its performance. Whatever duties a man is privileged to perform by virtue of his position in the scheme of life he should render them intelligently and diligently. Duties performed in a spirit of devotional love and service give man a wonderful experience of bliss which keeps him always cheerful. Performance of action in this manner is the most effective means of rendering real service to mankind.

### **Self-Abnegation in Service**

Gradually an individual should widen his circle of service till he serves humanity. He should not expect any return for his service, for, service of fellow beings is service of one's own self. This is true sacrifice. A person should ever enhance the limits of his service according to capacity. First comes the service of one's parents and those who are nearest to oneself; then of one's family and friends; then of fellow citizens and the community and the country, and ultimately of all mankind irrespective of any divisions. In rendering service, a person should always be particular to see that he is not doing it for the sake of more name and

fame or in expectation of any return. 'Do good and forget it with its performance'. This principle will make selfless service possible. When man begins to see his own good in the good of others, performance of selfless service becomes the prime duty of everyone. In the very act of serving others man forgets his little self. This is true self-sacrifice.

### What is Self ?

Mistaking the *Body* for the *self* lies at the root of all misery from which humanity has so far been suffering. This is responsible for creating insatiable desires in man, which breed dissensions, distrust, enmity, and all the evils and troubles that man is heir to in both his individual and corporate capacities. As fire cannot be quenched by pouring oil over it, which will make it burn all the more fiercely, the sensuous desires of the flesh only increase all the more by being gratified through self-indulgence. This is not the path of happiness. It brings only pain and misery. Happiness, bliss, and peace are attainable through spiritual realization, sublimation of desires, and the annihilation of that delusion which presents the gross body as the *self*. He who can merge his conditioned and limited self into the all-pervading universal Self, is truly happy in this world. Such a man alone can be the friend of all, the servant of all. None can set a limit to one's love for humanity except one's own pet sympathies and narrow predispositions. The highest catholicity and the utmost capacity for selfless service can exist side by side in the same individual. A society also can be constructed on such lines, for society is but an aggregate of individuals.

A man's interest can never be confined to the body alone. His Self, in fact, comprehends the whole universe as *One* with himself, because there is no meaning in considering man's existence *Apart* from the *Cosmos* as a whole. When he detaches his individual self from bodily attachments, he will comprehend the 'whole'. To comprehend the 'whole' is to *Love* one and all without distinction. In other words, it is to realize oneself in the 'whole' and the 'whole' in oneself. Truly, the word 'I' connotes not the individual little self but the omnipresent Soul or Self. The Self or Soul is one and the same in every being; so the 'I' cannot be more than one. Hence the individual soul is not apart from the real Self.

### **The Ideal of True Love**

The realize this Self one must love all. Selfless love, with infinite sympathy, will overcome all objective and physical limitations. For, love is the unifying force which binds not only man to man but also man to the universe and to his Maker. The love of a nurse-maid towards another's child she is in charge of, is of the unattached and unselfish kind. She feeds the child, loves it, plays with it, and is all kind towards it as if it is her own child. But, on being dismissed from service, she leaves the child, given up all attachment to it, and is ever willing to take service elsewhere and nurse another child. Similarly should one in the world behave in respect of all the things which one considers one's own and feels called upon to love and serve. Even as the nurse-maid looks after another's child in a spirit of non-attachment, keeps it safe and sound under her custody as a trust, and serves it with all the love she is capable of bestowing on it, so also should men learn to live and act with a deep sense of detachment, selfless love, and generous service and to view everything in our possession as a worthy trust from the Divinity, which we call God, remembering, at the same time, that HE can deprive us of anything when *he* so chooses and that we should not then feel pain or misery at the thought of loss or separation.

### **Pleasure and Pain and their Cause**

Attachment brings transient waves of pleasure and pain. When our relation with other things is characterized by physical and sensuous attachment, and we, for some reason or the other, fail to obtain those things, we feel pain. If we obtain them, we feel pleasure. But such pleasure or pain lasts for a short while only. It is not and cannot be permanent. For, all the material things of the universe with which we get attached are, by their very nature, perishable. Therefore, the pleasure or pain that we derive by our attachment to the material objects of this universe fades away within a short time. However, from this transient experience of pleasure and pain, man learns the great truth of life which leads him towards real knowledge. In all living beings, and especially in man, there exists an intense desire for permanent pleasure or happiness. And a time comes in the life of every man when he begins to realize the unreality and transitoriness of pleasure and pain. Then he understands that by attachment to material things he can never get permanent happiness, and that if he seeks spiritual union (*Yoga*) with

that immortal Life-Force called God, who is the changeless *one* in this over-changing world of many, he can attain to that state of permanent happiness for which his whole being is constantly yearning. This state of permanent happiness or Bliss Absolute (Brahmananda) is the same as living *in tune with the infinite*.

### **In Salvation Lies Bliss**

Unselfish work leads to purity of heart (Citta-Suddhi) and this in turn to *Spiritual Freedom* through elimination of the individual *Ego*. This is salvation or Self-realization or God-realization. In salvation lies the highest freedom and bliss; on attaining it, the individual's *Ego* dissolves completely and he becomes a Free Soul (*Jivnn-mukta*) who has achieved the one thing which is *permanent* and imperishable. When a man becomes unattached and unselfish, his actions do not *Force Fresh Shackles* of Karmic Bondage. Such performance of action and devotion to God leads the individual to the blissful state of salvation which is beyond words.

### **Universal Goodness Constitutes the Religion of Man**

To acquire this blissful state one has to act incessantly and lovingly. Every action needs to be tested on the *Touchstone* of universal goodness and *Moral Worth*. Any action which is right in accordance with *Truth* and *Justice* contributes to the awakening in man of universal goodness. Universal goodness is in itself *elevating*, and whatever elevates ennobles is *Man's Religion*. Elevation in every aspect of life forms the *Basis* of the whole science and *art of Religion*—elevation from ignorance to full knowledge, from the confined *Ego*-state to the *Free*-state of the *Soul*. It is the process of *Mans* going back (Nivritti) by conscious and determined effort, to the *Original Source* from which he has sprung. This one process is named variously by different seers and men of *God* in different parts of the world.

Man should fight man—is not what Religion teaches :

Man to be man must ever be humane;

Sense of humanity—the Brotherhood of *Man*.

And homage to *Almighty*—the Parenthood of God.

Are what any Religion worth the name aims at :

Therefore, it behoved not *Man* to decry Religion;

Realization by man of the *True Self*—the Great Truth—is its only goal.

