

24. Religions and morals

DEAR STUDENTS! The truth proclaimed by all religions is one and the same. The ultimate goal of all religions is the same. The primary object of religion is to cure man of his follies and make him a real human being. Equally, religion aims at promoting righteous conduct by transforming the mental attitude of man. Religion is concerned with developing in man faith in the Spirit, besides his preoccupation with the needs of the body. For all religions the foundation is morality. If morality declines, humanness will decline together with the eclipse of religion.

Morality is the basis of right conduct. Whether it is the State, the society or the individual, the basis for all of them is morality. When morality goes, all the three will be undermined. All prosperity and happiness are based on moral strength. It is to make man realise the value of the ethical life that religions came into being.

Religion aims at: promoting the harmony of body, intellect and mind through righteous conduct. Right conduct in its totality represents morality. It is otherwise known as *Dharma* (Righteousness). *Dharma* also means that which is *priyam* (pleasing). It also refers to what is real value in life. When one leads a life governed by moral values, he achieves the most precious things including name, fame and prosperity. Material objects have their value, but *Dharma* is invaluable. No price can be set on it.

***Dharma* and human values**

Dharma is otherwise known as *neethi* (morality). Morality is equated with selfless love. Religions were instituted to foster the well-being of society through the promotion of love. The ancient sages laid down certain rules and precepts in accordance with the times, the place and the circumstances of the country. These were intended to foster human values and were based on the scriptures and the *Vedas*. No one can determine the precise date, place or authorship of these regulations. The sages believed that these disciplines were conducive to the promotion of the highest human qualities and were divinely ordained to help mankind. With the efflux of time and because of the predilections of different sages, these rules got divided into *saakhas* and *upasaakhas* (branches and sub-branches), with the names of the respective sages attached to them. The names of sages like Vasishta, Gauthama, Paraasara, Viswamitra are associated with these *saakhas* (branches). They were all designed to promote social well-being. No one can fix the date or the name of the founder of the religion of the Bharatiyas. The fountain source of all the sects is the *Veda*.

The origin of post-Vedic religions

Apart from the *Vedic* religion, some other religions came into existence 2000-2500 years ago. The founders of these religions took note of the prevailing social conditions and sought to promote unity among the various sections through their teachings. There was basically no conflict between these different faiths. Unfortunately, the differences among the individual followers of these faiths resulted in the growth of narrow loyalties and credal conflicts. In each religion there were some virus elements which promoted hatred of other faiths. In truth, there is no conflict between one religion and another. The religion of the Bharatiyas is the most ancient in origin. Having regard to its *Vedic* basis, it has been described as Hinduism. The essence of this faith is its universality as expressed in the saying: "*Lokaas samasthaas sukhino bhavanthu*" (May all the peoples everywhere be happy). The Bharatiya faith laid stress on the happiness of everyone.

The objective of Islam, the religion of the Muslims, is also the same. In Persian, "Islam" means "surrender" or "peace". The inner meaning of this term is that man should surrender to God and live in peace with his fellow men. The holy book of Islam, the Quran, contains many sacred precepts. "Salaath" is one such precept. It enjoins one to worship God with steady faith. Another precept is "Zakaath", which enjoins the believer to practise charity for relieving fellow-beings in need or in distress. In the scriptures of the Bharatiyas, a similar duty has been laid down in the saying: "*Paropakarah punyaaya paapaaya parapeedanam*" (It is meritorious to help others and it is sinful to cause harm to others). It is by practising such precepts that people professing different faiths lived in harmony. Truth, peace, love, forbearance and compassion were regarded as the five life-breaths of their religion by the Bharatiyas.

Religious differences should never arise

Even the Quran declared that in discussing matters of religion and the teachings of different religions, acrimony should not be imported into the debate and the differences should be considered without bitterness. This is affirmed by every religion. But the followers of each faith, forgetting this fundamental truth, raised barriers based on credal differences which were really verbal and not fundamental.

Today various kinds of differences are arising among religions. This is not a good thing. Everyone should base his life on the divinely ordained morals and verities and endeavour to foster them. Morality should serve as the beacon light for everyone. Without that light human life will be plunged in darkness.

The ancient sages made known to the world that by their earnest quest for God, they had been able to experience the Divine. "We have seen that sacred effulgent *Purusha* (Lord) in our hearts." "We have seen Him beyond the *tamas* (darkness) of ignorance," they declared. But the purpose of human life is not merely to secure a vision of the Divine or to experience the bliss of that vision. Those who love sugar, must seek to become sugar itself. "*Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi*" (The knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* Itself). Religion aims at bringing about such a transformation. Making him a man to begin with, it seeks to transform him to *Madhava* (Divinity itself). Religion, which has such a sublime purpose, is being degraded to serve petty ends.

Why Hinduism stands out as a religion

The *Veda* is dualistic. We have in India the followers of Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhvacharya, representing three schools of philosophy. These sects are the products of individuals, but Hindu religion itself is not the creation of any individual. The basic Hindu faith is not for Indians alone but is for all mankind. The word "Hindu" is composed of the two syllables "*Him*," meaning *Himsa* (violence) and "*Du*" meaning, "distant." Hinduism is the faith that makes violence distant. That is the reason why Hinduism alone stands out as a religion that strives for the well-being of all peoples, in all countries, at all times. Hence the appellation, "*Sanathana*," meaning ancient or timeless. No one knows when it was revealed and who was its founder. Other religions have their chronology. The Hindu religion knows no growth or decline. It belongs to all countries. It is acceptable to all people.

Though people may call themselves Muslims, Christians, Hindus and the like, there should be no differences between them. Students should be completely free from sectarian differences. They

should respect all religions because what you cherish in your religion is found in other religions also. If you adhere to your own religion, you need not worry yourself about other religions.

In all religions, people have faith in certain beliefs. But they do not make any efforts, by enquiry or otherwise, to experience what they believe. Students!-Don't entertain religious differences. The God that is worshipped in all religions is one and the same. With that conviction, respect all religions. Realise that the essence of all religions is one. Don't enter into futile controversies or criticise other religions. It is fraught with danger. When you attack another religion, you are really guilty of assailing your own religion. Therefore, show your reverence to everyone. "Whatever deity you adore, the worship reaches the One Supreme Lord."

Discourse in the Prashaanthi Mandir on 23- 7-1989.

It is only by the cultivation of detachment, by denying the senses the thrills they thirst for, it is only by diving deeper into the depths of one's being, by believing that you have some depths that will reward exploration, that one can capture the exhilaration of that tranquillity. This is the highest morality, for when this is done, man is saturated with love and has no trace any more of malice or hate or greed or lust. The vision is purified by the ideal of the unity of all in One and the proliferation of One as all.

BABA