

Chapter VI. Religion is Experience

This wave-like movement of proceeding and receding, of merging and emerging, has been happening since time; it will happen till time ends; it is eternal in its feature. This is the belief of Indians (*Bharathiyas*). A person is not just this gross body; in it, there is a subtle component called mind; inside it, as its prompter and spring, is an even more subtle principle called the individualized soul (*jivatma*). This soul has neither beginning nor end, it knows no death, it has no birth. This is the basis of the Indian faith.

One other article of faith, which is a unique feature of Indian mental equipment: Until the individualized soul gets liberated from the individualization and merges in the Universal, thus attaining liberation (*moksha*), it has to encase itself in one body after another and go through the process called living. This idea is held by no other people. This is the cycle-of-birth-death (*samsara*) idea, which the ancient texts or scriptures of India reveal and propagate. *Samsara* means “movement into one form after another”.

The nature of Atmic reality

All the different schools and sects among the Indians (*Bharathiyas*) accept the fact that the apparently individualized souls (*jivatmas*) are eternal and unaffected by change. The schools and sects may differ in describing or denoting the relationship between the *Atma* and God. One school of thinkers may posit that the two are ever separate; another that the individualized soul (*jivatma*) is a spark in the universal flame of fire that God is; a third that the two are undifferentiated. But the truth remains that the *Atma* is beginningless and endless; since It is not born, It has no death. Its individualized image has to evolve through a series of bodies until it attains fulfilment in the human. All schools are one in upholding this faith, in spite of the variety of their other interpretations.

We now come to the foremost among the glorious truths, the most astounding of the basic truths that the human intellect has attained in the spiritual field: the *Atma* is, by its very nature, purity, fullness, and bliss (*parisuddha*, *paripurna*, and *ananda*). This is the belief that animates all schools of thought, whether they are worshipers of Sakthi, Siva, or Vishnu or whether they are Buddhists or Jains. Every Hindu acknowledges it.

The dualists (*dwaithins*) believe that the fundamental genuine nature of the *Atma* is bliss (*ananda*); this is diminished and desiccated by the consequences of human actions in life after life, so it has to be restored and revitalized by the grace of God. The monists (*a-dwaithins*) believe that there can be no diminution or desiccation. They assert that the *Atma* is fully splendrous; however, through the influence of the deluding effect of ignorance (*maya*), which superimposes false impression on what is really true, It appears as if it has diminished.

Whatever the differences in interpretation, when we take our stand on the central core of the truth on which all agree, a deep passage will be discerned between “East” and “West”, where both do journey to the goal. People of the Eastern countries seek the realization of this gloriously beneficent consummation in the inner regions of themselves. While worshipping, we close the eyes and endeavour to visualize God inside ourselves. People of the West lift up their faces and visualize God in outer space, in the beyond. Indians believe that the *Vedas* —their sacred scripture— were the very breath of God conveying meanings to the sages who had installed Him in their hearts. Westerners believe that their scriptures were recorded by people under the direction of God.

Another point must be understood: We have to hold fast to the belief, always. Unless a belief is held unshak-

en throughout night and day, it cannot be used to achieve victory. No success is possible otherwise. When a man asserts that he is low and mean and that he knows but little, he becomes low and mean and his knowledge shrinks.

We become what we believe we are. We are the children of almighty God, endowed with supreme power, glory, and wisdom. We are children of immortality. When we dwell in this thought, how can we ever be low and ignorant? Indian spiritual culture enjoins on everyone to believe that the real nature of mankind is supreme and that one should be ever conscious of this truth.

The Indians (*Bharathiyas*) of past ages had faith in their great reality. They achieved victory in their endeavours as a result of this faith and rose to lofty heights. They reached the peak of progress. Today, we have slid down into the present decline mainly because we have lost faith in the *Atma* in us. This was the beginning of our fall. For, loss of confidence in the Self (*Atma*) involves loss of faith in God Himself. That Omnipresence is the inner motivator of all, the warp and woof of our body and mind, our emotions and intellect. Strengthening faith in Him is the only means of realizing the highest goal of mankind. This is the lesson that Indian spiritual history longs to teach.

Children of immortality

Children of India (Bharath)! Teach your children this life-preserving, glorious, and heart-expanding truth from the early days of life. The sanctifying vision that Indians secured is this: the *Atma* is full and free. It is a wonderful discovery, a thrilling thought! The *Atma* is by its very nature full; fullness need not be attained or accomplished and added to it. If fullness could be added to it, it could also be subtracted by the passage of time; what is built up must disintegrate.

If one is impure by nature, even though one may succeed in achieving purity for five minutes, one has to wallow later in impurity, for the purity that comes in the middle will be easily swept away by circumstances. So, all Indian spiritual thinkers declared that purity is our nature and that fullness is our genuine reality. They said that we are never really “wanting”. This is the lesson that Indians taught the world. This is the stream of spiritual strength that flowed from India and fertilized the world.

At the end of life, one should bring to consciousness the great thoughts one has attained in life, the high feelings one entertained; this was the directive of the sages of India. They did not demand that one should bring to memory the faults and errors one committed in life. These are inevitable and universal. But the sages declared that one should always be aware of one’s reality, and one should ever be engaged in contemplating its grandeur and glory. That, they said, is the greatest step to progress.

We must pay attention to another fact, more than all else. For Indians, religion meant “experience” and nothing less. It is indeed pitiable that we so often forget this important fact. This secret must be imprinted on everyone’s heart. Only then can one be safe and secure. Not only this. It is not the way of thought of an Indian to say that all things can be attained by self-exertion; the Indian knows that divine will is the basis of everything.

Religious principles have to be practiced and their validity experienced. Listening to their exposition is of no use; learning one set of arguments and conclusions and repeating them parrot-like are not enough. If the arguments appeal to one’s intellect and are approved by it as correct, that will not help at all—they must transform us.

God is both Being and Becoming

Indians (*Bharathiyas*) posit God and declare that God is Being and Becoming, because that is their experience, which is the highest proof. The declaration does not originate from the head, from the faculty of reason (*yukthi*).

The forefathers asserted that the *Atma* is in each and that the *Atma* is but a spark of the universal *Atma*, for they had become aware of it, deeply and without doubt. There were, in the past, thousands who had sought the experience and won it. Even today, such people are not absent, and they will be present in the future, too. The experience is a thirst that affects mankind. Unless one contemplates God and confronts Him in bliss, unless one wins the awareness of *Atma* that is one's reality, one will be tormented by the thirst, the agony that one is "lacking completeness".

People must first grasp the truth. All religious factions and fights will vanish as fast as they grasp the Reality. For, the name "follower of theistic code of morals" can be allotted only to one who has experienced God and realized His Glory. Only those who have realized Him in their hearts can have the bonds that chain their hearts to the wheel of birth-death broken. Mere platform orations do not indicate awareness of the Truth that has to be attained through religion.

Theistic faith is based on genuine experience. Once this is accepted, self-examination starts and one is able to measure how far one has journeyed toward or away from the goal. One will then realize that one is groping in the dark and dragging others into darkness to grope with one. Only then will people give up factional hatreds in the name of religious war on those professing different faiths.

Those who revel in religious wars should be asked: "Have you seen God? Have you become aware of the divine *Atma*? Otherwise, what authority have you to decry or deny this name of God? Are you, while struggling in the darkness, attempting to draw me into that darkness, too? Can a blind person lead another blind person along the road? That is an impossible task. Therefore, understand your truth before you defame or deny mine."