

Chapter XVI. Mankind and God

For the consummation of human evolution and the realization by people of their highest goal, religion and spiritual discipline are very essential. Religion is the link between the individual and the universe, between the individual soul and God (*jiva* and *Deva*). If the link does not exist, life becomes chaos. A cow caught on a hill, wanting to go to the opposite hill but confronted with a flooded river in between, needs a bridge between the two. That is what religion is. Between the hill of individual life and the region of the Universal runs the flooded river of nature, with all its confusions and complexities. It is difficult to discover where it comes from, how it accumulates all that uproar, and where it ultimately ends. But, fortunately, in every human community we have bridge builders who help people to cross.

Vedic religion sourced in God, non-Vedic religions in God-man

We may have more than one bridge, but the purpose of each is the same. The bridge built by the sages and seers of India is known as the bridge of Eternal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*). It is called so because it is an eternal, everlasting bridge based on the ageless foundation of the *Vedas*, and it can be used reliably by all, in all countries and at all times. That is why it is sometimes called the *Vedic* bridge and the *Vedic* path, also as the Aryan Path. All attempts to trace those who have laid this path have failed. This is why people have given up the search in despair, characterizing the path as undesigned. They assured themselves that the Lord himself was the designer.

All religions and spiritual paths laid through the ages are indeed sacred, for they have all been designed by messengers of the Lord, chosen because they are the foremost of people. Buddha, Jesus Christ, Zoroaster, Mohammed —such names are known worldwide. Their doctrines, ideals, and thoughts have all become so valid for their followers that their names have been identified with their religions.

Since the ideal religion at the time of Christ was believed to be the message from God and since that message was communicated and spread by Jesus Christ, his name was given to it. So also the Buddhist religion was named after Buddha, since it was intuited and spread through him as the divine instrument. Mohammed, who heard the message of God, laid down doctrines and disciplines, and those who follow them are said to belong to Mohammedanism. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that all these religions are products of the foremost among people and the most ideal messengers of the Lord.

Divine intelligence is universal and all-comprehensive. Human intelligence is confined within narrow limits. Its range is very poor. The scriptures deal with only one goal, but they indicate different paths to reach it. Each path could be a definite religion, and its doctrines and disciplines could be considered different from the rest. So the statement that Rama, Christ, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mohammed, and others are one is not valid.

Doctrine of rebirth unique to Vedic religion

In the Christian religion, it is stated that individual beings were created as they are. It is said that Allah did the same. Even Zoroastrian and Buddhist religions describe creation more or less on the same lines. But *Vedic* religion has a different version. The individual is as eternal as God. He is a spark of God. If there are no beings (*jivis*) there is no God (*Deva*). This is especially emphasized in the *Vedas*. Followers of other religions are, in recent times, recognizing this truth. The present life of each is only an interval between previous and future lives. It is but a step

toward the next. This is indicated in the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* instruct about the relationship between the previous and future births. No other religion has revealed so much about previous and future births.

Another point: Among the four objectives of life —right action, wealth, desire, and liberation (*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*)— various religions describe the stage of liberation in various ways. Each one lays down some doctrine and insists upon faith in it. Therefore, there is no agreement or identity between the experiences they describe. The Hindu description of the experience, however, can be gained by followers of all religions. There may be agreement in the details of the descriptions in various religions, but the total experience is not described in the same manner. The reason is this: the Hindu religion, which has come down from the timeless past, is really supreme. Other faiths are based only on some of the doctrines of Hinduism selected by them and developed in accordance with the traditions and culture of their own region. Therefore, truths inherent in the Hindu faith often appear in those other faiths. Hinduism and Hindu culture have been flowing as one continuous stream.

Vedic rituals: stepping stones to God

In the Hindu religion, rituals and ceremonies were laid down, to be observed from sunrise to nightfall, without intermission. Many of them are elaborate ceremonies (*yajnas*), rituals (*yagas*), and sacrificial offerings to divine powers, appropriate to the baby growing in the womb until its death and the subsequent attainment of higher worlds. But these rituals and dedicatory ceremonies were not enough, and elaborate disciplines of living were also laid down. No other religion has so many and so elaborate rules of living. Therefore, it wouldn't be correct to declare that all religions are the same. They might have adopted a few or many of these rules of living from Hinduism, since Hinduism has laid emphasis on them from the beginning.

In order to carry out this heavy schedule of ritual or action (*karma*), one must have devotion, spiritual wisdom, and self control (*bhakthi*, *jnana*, and *yoga*). *Dharma* is the taproot of the great tree of religion. It is the eternal source of its strength. It is fed by waters of devotion; the leaves and flowers are renunciation and other virtues, and the fruit is understanding.

In these stages of growth, if there is any interruption or deficiency, that is to say, even if any regulation is missed, the fruit of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) that the tree yields will be affected adversely.

Such strict plans for spiritual progress can be found only in Hinduism and not in any other faith. For Hinduism is the nectar churned and prepared by the ancient sages (*rishis*) out of their own genuine experience. It is not put together from things available in books.

Past actions influence future births

It is not proper to adopt whichever faith or code that pleases one most at the moment, believing that life is a matter of just three days. One needs morality and self control. Life is a long journey through time, and religion confers peace for the present and encouragement for the future. We must believe that we are at present undergoing the consequences of our own activities in the past.

It is a great source of peace to be content with one's present conditions because one knows oneself to be the cause and knows that doing good and meritorious deeds now can build a happy future. This is great encouragement. It is only when life is run on these two lines that morality and self control can have a place in life. The power to adhere to these two ideals consists in the encouragement and enthusiasm given by religion.

We cannot determine the origin or end of religion. So also, it is difficult to declare the origin and end of the individual (*jiva*). According to Hinduism, an individual is timeless, and the present life is but the latest of the series brought about by its own thoughts and acts. The individual has not come now as a result of either the anger or the grace of God. These are not the cause of this present existence. This is the declaration made by the Eternal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*).

Vedic religion is holistic, not partial

Religion cannot be, at any time, a mere personal affair. It may be possible to assert so, since each one's faith is rooted in himself and since each one expresses that faith in their own behaviour and actions. But how far is that statement valid? It is not valid to assert that there is no God or religion or caste (*varna*), as many intelligent people do to their own satisfaction. We find a large number of people proclaiming the nonexistence of God and declaring that the directives to guide and sublimate one's activities that are laid down in all religions are superstitions. These people are not ignoramuses. They are not without education. When such individuals characterize spiritual beliefs and practices as superstition, what importance can we attach to their statements? If they entertain such convictions in their hearts, society need not complain, for it suffers no harm. But they don't stay quiet.

For example, intoxicating drinks like toddy and brandy are indulged in by others. Can this be dealt with as if it is a personal affair? Do others feel happy over it? However emphatically the matter is declared "personal", this evil habit affects society subtly and openly in various ways. It demonstrates its nefarious effects, in spite of everything. When ordinary people indulge in such harmful habits, the danger is not so considerable. But when elders who have won a name in society do so, the common people also follows the evil path.

The works of Vyasa and Valmiki are very ancient. Such writings of past ages are aptly called *Puranas*. But, though centuries have flown by since they were born, age is powerless to affect them. Had it been otherwise, they would not be loved and demanded even today by people residing all over the land from the Himalayas to Sethu. The texts are so young and fresh; they are unaffected by the passage of time. Whoever desires bliss (*ananda*), at whatever place, whenever it is needed, can become immersed in it.

Manu's code of law is unequaled

The *Manu Dharma Sastra* is unique; no text compares with it in any country throughout history. Can anyone create a book of the same type at any time? The doctrines of the Hindu faith and the scriptures (*sastras*) that enshrine them do not offer homage to material sciences. These sciences do, of course, progress from day to day, but the theories honoured one day are condemned the next day, and new theories are brought up to explain the same phenomenon. How then can the eternal and ever valid truths of the spirit honour the material sciences? The scientists of today call this attitude blind faith; they want it to be discarded. They want every subjective and objective fact to be examined and put to rigorous tests. They confuse themselves when they consider this as an independent path to the discovery of reality. That is not correct.

There is no need to dig up and lay bare new doctrines. Every principle and path is readily available. Understanding is the only thing we need aspire to. Western philosophers from Kant to Spencer have, in fact, only dwelt upon some facets of the dualistic, nondualistic, and qualified nondualistic (*dwaitha, a-dwaitha, visishtadwaitha*) schools of thought. Hindus have long ago delved into these matters and reduced their understandings to doctrines and principles.