

Discourses/Articles
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TRUE RELIGION

(Spoken in 1991 to the organizer of a religious conference for world peace)

Namaskar!sometimes occupies the mind even of the so-called religious people. Even religious people work hard for material expansion of their institutions, and lot of money they want, and name, fame comes in. You see, this name, fame, greed are great obstacles and they, being the part and parcel of the human nature - it is like the very skin of man. Name, fame, greed - they are the very skin of the person, and to peel the skin is very difficult. It requires a perfection of spirit in one's own self. He should not merely be a teacher or a preacher of religion, he must be a religious person himself; and you know very well - I need not tell you all these things - what is to *be* a religious person. It is the planting of the consciousness of God in one's own heart.

For that, we have to bring before the minds of people what actually do they mean by 'God'? What is it - a theoretical concept? Or is it a "may be or may not be" question; and is it a necessity, or it has any significance in our life? You ask religious people, all the religious people: What is the significance of the presence of God in human life? Let answers come. Is it a question of tomorrow, or after death? Do we reach God after death, and not in this life?

Most of the religions, or I should say all the religions, have a peculiar notion of the other-worldly character of God. It is a defect in human thinking. There is no other-worldly isolation of existence, because existence is a complete, organismic structure wherein you cannot distinguish between past, present and future; and if you accept God is eternal, He is not tomorrow. It is just now; and not somewhere in heaven, here. So God is not in heaven, and He is not tomorrow. Now if we can give up or free ourselves from this wrong notion of tomorrow and somewhere... Look at the mind of man: Where is God, you ask. Where is God? At this moment, where is God? Just now when we are speaking, where is God sitting? It is difficult for the mind to accommodate itself to this question. It will shatter the whole body. The very thought will shake the whole personality. You are asking this question: Where is God just now? The whole ego of man will tremble, like this, because the ego cannot stand this question. It can answer any question, but the ego cannot answer this question because if it starts answering this question, it will cease to exist at that very moment.

It requires purification of heart. All religious studies, any kind of religious way of living, is preceded by a moral, ethical purificatory process. It is not easy to be religious. Going to a temple, going to a church, and fasting on Sundays, and sleeping late in the night, rolling the beads - this is not religion. Religion is the consciousness of God, and to the extent one is conscious of the presence of God, to that extent one is religious. It has nothing to with political activity, social welfare work and all that. Though there is no

objection to that, it cannot be identified with religion. Religion is not one way of living. It is the *only* way of living, and that must inundate the whole personality of the person.

You must be bathed in religion, so that you are the embodiment of religious consciousness itself. You are not flesh and bone. You are not a physical personality. You are a form taken by aspiration for the Almighty. You may be regarded as a representative of God in this phenomenal world. So when you walk, you walk like an ambassador of God. The ambassador is the government represented. The entire force of the government is working through him; and if the force of God can work through you, you are an incarnation, you are a Krishna or Christ - whatever you are - you are a God-man, and such a person alone can work some benefit in this world.

Political leaders whose names are appearing in the newspapers, and who are only bookish, fundamentalist and tradition-bound - this kind of thing will not work before God. When we go to God, we don't go as Hindus and Christians; we don't go as men and women. In what sense we go there? Let us accept that we are going to attain God. When we go there, how do we go - as Christians, as Muslims? "I am a Muslim" - will you say that before God Almighty?

It is necessary to convince ourselves that we are just now in the presence of God. Just now; and in the presence of God, what will you do? Here is ethics and morality. Whatever you will do in the presence of God, that is goodness, that is ethics, that is morality. Let anyone for a few minutes close the eyes and contemplate: "I am in the presence of the Almighty, creator of the universe; He is seeing me." Now what will you do at that time? You will melt completely. You will become liquid, and you cease to be at that time; and what you will be at that time, let the experience only be saying. You cannot describe it in words.

If there is such a person in this world who can understand these significant factors in religious living, I think that person can work wonders in the world. There was a person like this in Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. You cannot call him a religious man. He was a God-man. God was dancing in his heart; and so if he thought something, it was reverberating in the whole world. So was Ramana Maharishi. So were great saints and sages who lived in this world, whether of the East or the West. And so it is necessary to free ourselves from the need to be presented before public eye; but have a desire to convince yourself that you are in the vicinity, in the presence of God Almighty. This not a theory; this is not a scripture speaking. It is a hundred percent fact. That God is just here and looking at you, is not a theoretical doctrine. It is not an imagination. It is a highly perfect scientific fact, and no science can be more perfect than this feeling and conviction that you are being seen by millions of eyes. Every atom is the eye of God, and He sees you from all directions.

You must read a great poem from the Atharva Veda. I will read it to you. It was translated into English by a great German orientalist. The prayer offered to the Almighty in the mantras of the Atharva Veda; I will read it to you. It is something very touching indeed. The translation was done beautifully, in a poetic manner, by a scholar called John Muir. I don't know if you have heard of him. He is a great Sanskrit scholar who wrote five volumes on original Sanskrit texts - all deep research on all the Sanskrit books. There is no Sanskrit book that he has not read and mastered. Anyway. I am

mentioning the English translation of that prayer from Atharva Veda that he has translated. This is from Atharva Veda:

*The mighty Lord on high,
our deeds as if at hand espies;
The gods know all men do,
though men would feign their deeds disguise.*

*Whoever stands, whoever moves
or steals from place to place
Or hides him in his secret cell,
the gods his movement trace.*

This is addressed to Varuna, which was the name of the Absolute in the Atharva Veda

*Wherever two together plot,
and deem they are alone;
King Varuna is there, a third,
and all their schemes are known.*

When we are talking now, there is somebody in the middle. Neither you can see that nor I can see, but there is a third element which is making it possible for us to converse with each other.

*This earth is His,
to Him belong those vast and boundless skies;
Both seas within Him rest,
and yet in that small pool He lies in the heart.*

*Wherever, whoever far beyond the sky
should think his way to wink;
He could not there elude
the grasp of Varuna the King.*

*His spies descending from the skies
glide all this world around;
Their thousand eyes all-scanning,
sweep to earth's remotest corner, remotest bound.*

*Whatever exists in heaven and earth,
whatever beyond the skies;
Before the eyes of Varuna the King
unfolded lies.*

*The ceaseless winking all He counts,
of every mortal's eyes;
He wields this universal frame,
as gamester throws his dice.*

He plays with us, and I am reminded here of a line from Shakespeare which says that gods play with men as children play with flies. This is how gods treat us.

Anyway, I feel it is not easy to be truly religious, because it is not easy to truly love God. That, again, because it is not easy to understand what God is; and if one clearly has a concept of what God is, he will shrink into a non-entity in one minute, and he will be filled with God. "Empty thyself and I shall fill thee." This is the whole of religion: Empty thyself; I shall fill thee. But you are like a dustbin, already filled with some rubbish. How will you have fragrance put into it?

We may talk of God but, really speaking, we have no faith in God. Sometimes there is doubt also: "Whether he will give something to me, or he will ignore me. Is it possible to reach Him or not? Suppose He does not respond to my request, what will happen to me? I must have my own strengths, a little bit. What is the guarantee that He will actually bless me? And He may be far away; I may not be able to reach Him in several births." If the time consciousness vanishes from us, the eternity descends into our heart, and God is just now here. If there is such a person in this world, he is the protector and the savior of humanity.

If God is eternity, non-spatial, non-temporal existence, the world is not outside us. You catch my point? If ultimate reality is timeless eternity, the world cannot be external. If it is not external, it is identical with our personality. There is no spatial distinction between ourselves and the world. The world is a total whole, which includes me and you. So you cannot look at the world, you cannot see it; because to see it is to externalize it, to make it an alien to yourself, which is not the fact. You are a part of the world, organically connected, inextricably related to it. How will you see the world? When you say we are seeing the world, it is a mistake. You have isolated yourself from the total whole to which you already belong. So to think the world would be to think as the world would think itself. You understand me? Here is, according to me, the spirit of religion or spirituality, which is not dead; it is still alive in this world, fortunately. It may be somewhere from the point of view of quantum, but it is still alive. God is not dead, as Nietzsche said. He is not dead - very well alive - and if God has created the world, as you believe, He knows also how to take care of it. And we are instruments in His hand, because we are part and parcel of this universal organism of Being.

What I am telling you just now is a kind of meditation. It is not a lecture I am speaking to you. I am just concentrating my mind on the ultimate meaning of life, which is nothing but the consciousness of the omnipresence of the Almighty, omnipotence of the Almighty, and omniscience of the Almighty, from which we cannot extricate ourselves. We are just in it, and therefore we are well guarded. "He who is united with Me in spirit, I shall take care of that person in every way" is a verse from the Bhagavadgita - God speaking to man. You know some Sanskrit?

Ananyas cintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate tesham nityabhiyuktanam yogaksemam vahamy aham (Gita 9.22) is the verse in the middle of the Bhagavadgita, which is the Absolute speaking to the relative, eternity speaking to time, God speaking to man, as you may say. "Whoever is undividedly conscious of Me, it is My responsibility to take care of that individual in every way." If you want a spoon of sugar for your tea, God will give it. You may not think it a silly matter. There is no silly matter for God. He is

Himself operating everywhere. In every little... even a cup of tea - He is operating there. If you want a spoon of sugar, it will topple. It has to come, if it is God that is wanting it. When you want, it is God wanting. Let us be sure. We don't distrust. Don't have lack of faith. "Oh! It cannot be! It cannot be! When I want something, it is not God wanting." You should not say like that. Then immediately you cut yourself apart from God. A person who is centered in God, when that person thinks, God thinks; and therefore it has to act and take effect immediately, materially. Such a person is a saint, such a person is a representative of God in this world, and these persons should form a conference as your target of religion. You bring them together; but be careful that they are really great people. You don't want 25 or 100.

Daniel: There is no number really, but it will be a small number.

SWAMIJI: Persons like Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharishi, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, let them all sit at one table. What will they think? They will not talk much. They will not say anything. Just imagine a conference where these people are all sitting. Aurobindo is sitting; Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharishi, and let Krishna and Christ also be there. What will they speak? That is a real conference.

Daniel: Here is a question about this, because you have been speaking the very highest Vedanta...

SWAMIJI: I don't think it is Vedanta. It is the science of life. No, why you use such words - 'Vedanta', 'Bhakti' all that. Let us not use any jargon. It is the principle of life; and it has no language, no tenet and does not belong to any clan or cult or religion - nothing of that kind. It is the science of Being. Science is not partial, it is an inexorable law. Inexorable law cannot be diluted by any kind of human expectations. You have to raise yourself to that level, and not bring that down to your level.

Daniel: I won't put a label on it. What I am thinking of is the example of Vivekananda, who struggled to find ways to talk to the millions of people he spoke to; to rouse them to higher levels...

SWAMIJI: Because he was speaking through his spirit; because it was thunder from the wisdom of God that he was enshrining in himself. It is not an ordinary lecturer that he was.

Daniel: No, I understand, but I am thinking he was finding words because he was concerned that they'd be able to understand what he had to say, and rouse themselves. In America, he spoke one way; when he came to India, he spoke a different way.

SWAMIJI: Of course, he would have noticed the attitude of the audience. You cannot speak same thing everywhere. In the railway station, you will speak in one way, in the market place another way, in the church in another way, and to intellectuals in Oxford University in another way; it is of course expected.

Daniel: So, I'm thinking there must be good ways of teaching. In the world today, a world that is saturated and preoccupied with...

SWAMIJI: The teacher should come to the level of the audience. He should neither be below that nor above that. There should be en rapport between the person who receives and the person who imparts the knowledge. A good teacher will not go above, nor he will go below. He will be on a par; he will be a friend of people. He will shake hands with the audience. Then good communication will take place between himself and the audience. Even if you know much more than the audience, you can speak only in that manner which can be received by the audience. You can galvanize it or sugar coat it in whatever way you like.

You can teach philosophy even to a child. It is not impossible. Yes, it is not impossible. It all depends upon how you speak. Once I had an occasion in Delhi to speak to little kids, and afterwards I had to speak to some intellectuals. The intellectuals who heard my lecture said, "Swamiji, what you spoke to the children is much better than what you talked to us."