The essence of religion is adoration of God. The permanency of a religion is based on its substantial foundations, which is dependent on its universality of outlook. The more universal we are, the more permanent we are. Religion, to be permanent, to be Sanatana, should cater to the needs of all creation, and to the extent it excludes, it is subject to destruction. Sanatana Dharma is eternal religion. It belongs to creation as a whole. It is capable of adjusting itself to the vicissitudes of time.

An idea or concept cannot be eternal unless it is capable of enduring. But everything here is perishable. The body perishes. The world is subject to change and destruction. The world is anitya and asukha. How then can we have something which is eternal in this anitya world? Man is not eternal. Even the greatest saviours have gone. Even Avatars like Rama and Krishna have cast off their physical bodies. Yet, there is something enduring in the midst of all unenduring things. The Upanishads refer to it as the eternal among those which are not permanent. Even though
everything is unenduring, we say eternal dharma, Sanatana Dharma, notwithstanding the fact that none have seen it.

Bharatavarsha is identified with eternal religion. Sanatana Dharma is capable of adapting itself to changing time. Some opine that the caste system is one of the reasons for this. Others hold that it is capable of absorbing into itself, and so it is eternal. But, where lies the centre of this religion? What is the substance of our religion that is the cause of its Santana? As I told you in the beginning, it is in the adoration of God, which is the quintessence of religion.

Now, the concept of God differs in every religion and, accordingly, the relation between man and God also differs. The perpetual relation is the relation of the essential nature of the human being, and not the outer relation. That which is eternal in us establishes a relation with that which is eternal in the cosmos so, that the relationship will be eternal. There cannot be relation between the eternal and the non-eternal. Thus, this eternal relation is the summoning of the inner with the outer. It is the cry of the soul for God. As God is eternal, religion must be eternal, as it is the way for the establishment of a relation between man and God, between Nara and Narayana, between Arjuna and Sri Krishna.

How can we establish relation with God? We have not seen God. He is unknown, unthinkable. Hence, relation would fade away if one of its ends was not clear to the mind of the man. This is one of the reasons why religions shake. Therefore, viveka, or clear understanding, is necessary. It is one of the qualifications of an aspirant. He must have an
unshakable conviction and conception of God. It must a perception, a clear vision.

Hence, our seers have emphasised that a person who is to be initiated into the Sanatana Dharma should pass through the Gurukula. It is not like the present day education. After coming out of the college, he does not know what to do. He has not been taught to live. He is filled with all unwanted information, not useful for living. But in the Gurukula, the inner man is trained, and faith is given the greatest importance. The human intellect cannot function except in terms of duality, such as ‘I and you are different’, ‘The world is outside me, and I have a function to perform for my satisfaction in the world which is outside me’, etc.

Religion is not rooted in the reason of man, but in faith based on intellect. It is a symbol of inner culture. This inner training imparted in ancient times was of a permanent nature, and was to help the student throughout his life. Today there is a large gap between education and life. There is nothing which touches the soul of man. The Gurukula during the Bramacharaya ashrama was a process of initiation of the soul into true living in the consciousness of a higher life. The students were told to always live for something higher, as the present life is not complete. It was taught that life is a process for higher living, a journey to reach a destination.

Religion, therefore, takes that higher into consideration. At every step in the journey, an inner connection is established between the soul and God. Religion is what we
do when we are alone, and not what we worship in temples, etc. It is the unfoldment of our consciousness.

Sanatana Dharma has the capacity to include everything in itself because of its universality. It sees God everywhere. The idea of Avatara makes this concept easy of understanding. The concept of Avatara is peculiar to our religion, though it is in some other religions also. Avatara means coming down. It is the descent of God into the world. How can God descend when He is universal? Then, what is Avatara? It is not so much like a person coming down the steps; it is grander and more profound. Avataras, as generally understood, are possible only when there is a collective cry of humanity for redeeming humanity from some calamity. Then such Avataras, as the Ten Avataras, come. We also have lesser Avataras, like Sankara, etc, called Amsavatara.

It is one of the fundamentals of religious worship that God is immanent, God is in the world. He sees us, hears us. Hence, religion becomes a matter of the heart, of love, adoration and feeling. That God is all-pervading, omnipresent, just here, not apart from us even by a few inches, is the soul or essence of religion. Mere speculation is not religion. Philosophy put into practice is religion.

Religion is, therefore, divine living – divine life. It is not your religion or my religion. It is religion of humanity because it is the relation of man and God – not Hindu with God, nor Christian with God, but man with God. Religion, therefore, essentially cannot be many. Yet, universal religion is not possible, because each one’s way is different. The
approach is different because of the difference in the temperaments and capacities. So, we have tolerance. Universal religion should therefore mean following one’s religion with tolerance towards all other religions.

It is impossible to think of God as He is. To think of God as He is, we have to cease to be. Hence, the idea of Avatara is given – as He is to man, as He is manifest. Avatara is the connecting link between the ordinary human nature and the divine. Avatara is the manifestation of God through Mula Prakrati. That is why we have to worship Avatara, though God is everywhere and can be worshipped as such.

Whether an Avatara is a descent of God to man or the man’s ascent to God is immaterial to us. Literally, Avatara means descent or manifestation, as also told in the Gita. When the need for the higher life is felt more, the Avatara becomes necessary. The farther we are from God, the greater is the need we feel for the higher life. When humanity drifts too much from Truth, the Avatara becomes very necessary.

God tolerates our mistakes to some extent. When we go too far, He comes with a rod to correct us. Just as a mother allows her child to play and go here and there, but when the child is about to fall into a pit she runs to help it, God manifests when it is necessary to correct mankind. Lord Rama had to manifest when it was impossible for people to live. The Avatara comes when evil is too much or when sattva is too much – when we are in a high state of spiritual consciousness. In both cases, he comes. Avatara is divinity.
manifested into *prakriti* to draw humanity. It is the grace of God on man. It is the descent of God for the ascent of man, as Sri Gurudev put it.

Lord Rama is Maryada Purushottam, the superman who came to set an ideal for man. In Rama is the ideal of practice, and not teaching. Therefore, there is no necessity to preach about Rama Rajya. If each and everyone establishes that perfection of Rama in oneself, then Rama Rajya will come by itself.