

THOUGHTS ON RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY AND SPIRITUALITY

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I can only say what I am in the habit of thinking always; what else can be said? My usual trend of thinking every day, under every condition practically, is all that I can endeavour to express: how I think, and what my habitual way of thinking is. Whatever be the outer mode that one's life may take, it has a background and a support of thought and idealism. This is what determines the nature of a person, and speaks for itself without necessarily being expressed in words or language.

Our lives do not consist of actions or functions, performances, or celebrations, etc., but they consist of certain adjustments. So, it can be safely said that whatever we do in our lives, individually or otherwise, is a sort of adjustment, which looks like an activity, an action, an enterprise, a project, and so on. There is nothing in life

except this simple fact. The life that one may try to live, the simple things that everyone does, is a kind of necessary adjustment of oneself to certain conditions. That is all that life actually is, at least as it appears to our practical experience.

But what is this adjustment? If this is to be understood, and if it can be understood, then it becomes an intelligent guide and a safe light post on the path we are treading by way of these adjustments. Otherwise, the adjustments become compulsive, thrust upon us, and that adjustment which we make compulsorily due to conditions is what we call hardship, difficulty, problems, suffering, etc. But if this adjustment, which usually goes by the name of a pressure and a difficulty, can be made part and parcel of our intelligence, understanding, conscious conduct and behaviour, then it becomes what the ancient masters called yoga.

What we call difficulty or hardship in life, problem and sorrow, is itself yoga, when it is understood. Yoga, when it is not understood, is a problem and a trouble and a suffering in life; but suffering, when understood, is the practice of yoga. A great Buddhist scholar known as Nagarjuna, the great predecessor of even Acharya Sankara in dialectics and polemics, declared as the quintessence of his tremendous work: "Where there is samsara, there is moksha; where there is moksha, there is samsara." What we call bondage is itself freedom, and what we call freedom is itself bondage.

Therefore, we need not escape from bondage to achieve freedom; we have only to understand what bondage is, and we are at once free. It is not movement from bondage to

freedom, from samsara to moksha, from the world to God. It is an awakening, a word which we have heard and repeated so many times, and which is thought to be understood by so many people, but is never really understood.

There is nothing that we have to do in this world; we have only to understand, and nothing else. It is not a transformation that is called for, not an evolution, nor a revolution. It is pure awakening, the rising of the sun of knowledge. Nothing happens to the world when we are free. The world is the same. Nothing happens even to us. But a tremendous transformation takes place in a different way altogether – in a four-dimensional pattern, as modern scientists would put it. Instead of a three-dimensional existence, we enter into a four-dimensional eternity.

This so-called three-dimensional time-space life of ours gets illumined with the new light of the four-dimensional consciousness. In the language of the Mandukya Upanishad, it is a rising of the experiencing individual from the three states to the fourth state, called *turiya* – from the three dimensions of waking, dream and deep sleep we go to the fourth dimension of *turiya*.

We do not go, we do not move; nothing happens. What happens to us when we wake up from sleep? We have not gone to a different place or become a different person, but a tremendous change has taken place in us. It is as if we have been transported into a different realm altogether, into a new reality, the nature of which is well known to everyone. It is the contrast between the reality of dream and deep sleep and the reality of waking.

But what is this contrast? Notwithstanding this breath-taking difference between the realities of dream, deep sleep and waking, it is the same thing. The same thing that appeared as dream appears now as waking. We have changed the angle of our vision, the standpoint of perception and experience.

This is a hard job for the human understanding to achieve. Because of the difficulty in absorbing this technique of understanding human life, religions have not succeeded, philosophies have not succeeded, enthusiasts in the social field have not succeeded, and history has repeated itself in the same pattern for ages and ages. All the efforts of man seem to be a failure in the end on account of a tiny defect in his way of thinking. But a great question arises before oneself: “Yes, we have appreciated the situation; is there a way out?” Even Master Sankara could not give an answer to this question of “What is the way out?” When the way is visible to our mental eye, that is the only way out. We do not know how it comes.

A question is posed by Acharya Sankara, the great expounder of Vedanta philosophy, in his commentary on the Brahma Sutras: How does knowledge arise in a person? Does it come from books, does it come from teachers, or does it come by the kicks and blows that we receive in life? Does it come from God by a mandate of His will, or a fiat of His grace? We cannot say that knowledge comes through our effort, because our efforts are conditioned by the knowledge that we already have. So we cannot put forth an effort which is superior to the knowledge that we already have. How can there be an effort which transcends itself for the purpose of a higher knowledge? Therefore, it is difficult

to say that effort is the cause of knowledge. Nor is it true that the mere sufferings and buffets that we receive in life are the source of all knowledge. Many people suffer in life, but they gain no knowledge.

Well, is it a whim of God that He suddenly forces knowledge upon us? It is difficult to say; maybe, maybe not. There is no answer. The answer is that this happens. Suddenly we awaken. How did we get up from sleep? Who woke us up – God, man, our efforts, our studies? Nothing of the kind. We cannot say how we woke up from sleep. Something occurs, and that occurrence is awakening. It is a mixture, a blend, a combination, a coordination of many factors. God plays a role, man plays a role, society plays a role, and our effort plays a role, naturally. The evolutionary urge also plays a role. All these work together in the production of this tremendous universal effect called awakening.

Therefore, we have to wait like a servant waiting for his wages. There is nothing that we can do except wait for the first of the month to gain our salary. “When the first comes, I will have my salary.” We go on waiting, but merely because we wait, the first will not hurry itself. It has its own way of coming. If we are eagerly awaiting the first of the month, it cannot come tomorrow merely because we expect it. But, nevertheless, we expect it, and it comes at its own proper time. In due course of time we will get it.

If we are sincerely aspiring, it shall be given. Our soul should ask for the knowledge that is necessary for the sake of this great understanding. Ask and it shall be given. But what are we asking? We do not know what to ask. So, how can we ask? We can only be sincerely awaiting illumination

so that we may understand what that is. We cannot ask for freedom, as we do not know what freedom is. People ask for freedom, not knowing what it is. We cannot be free as long as we are in a world of elements. When we breathe air over which we have no control, when we depend on water and sunlight over which we have no control, how can we say that we are free? What freedom have we attained? So there is no freedom for anyone who lives in the world, nor is there freedom in getting out of the world. Freedom is an awakening into the structure of the world itself.

Religion has been said to be an answer in the cultural history of mankind. People have turned to religion when there was sorrow in life. But we have many religions. They are like professions, like vocations in life. "I belong to this religion." It is something like saying, "I am an industrialist, I am a businessman, I am a teacher, I am a painter." We have some business and profession, and religion also has become a kind of profession. We go to the temple or to the church, and so on.

We can very easily deceive ourselves into a religious consciousness. There cannot be anything easier in life than self-deception. Everything is difficult except this. Very simply, we can turn ourselves into a great saint in a minute without having altered our position even a little bit. The greatest danger in life is self-deception. Self-deception need not necessarily be deliberate. Generally we define self-deception as a kind of trick that one plays upon oneself and others, for the purpose of gaining an ulterior motive. It is not always true. One can be deceiving oneself without knowing what is happening because a twist in consciousness gets identified with the totality of one's

psychophysical being, and one becomes an embodiment of that deception. So we cannot find fault in a person who is under that coma of self-deception. He does not deceive purposely, or deliberately, dexterously with premeditation. It has taken place due to an overwhelming pressure of the unconscious level of the mind.

Why does this happen? Why do we deceive ourselves and place ourselves at the mercy of an unconscious blast that blows upon our face from the bottom of the sea of the unknown? This is because we are many times too over-enthusiastic. We may be very sincere, and yet wrongly; it is possible. Sincerity comes, honesty comes, but we may be duller in understanding even there. All told, the whole thing is a difficulty. We are not in a pleasure garden or a rose bed; we are in a situation where we have to be vigilant at every moment. And we have to wait for an occurrence to take place, rather than press ourselves egoistically into any kind of situation.

The only sadhana or practice that we can execute is to withdraw our personality from occurrences that take place. We should not thrust our personality into any situation and then seek meritorious work. Nature is very spontaneous in its action. It is not artificial or contrived with any kind of ulterior purpose. So we have to allow nature to work in a spontaneous manner.

Spontaneity and egoism are opposites. Where there is egoism, there is no spontaneity. It is all make-believe. We have to withdraw our personality from the experiences that we are undergoing in life and allow the experiences to take place and pass. When we take a bath in the ocean we should not fight with the waves, we should allow the waves to cross

and move over our head; we should not oppose them and fight them, for then they will be capable of pressing us down.

Our personality is our trouble, which is an external form of what we call the egoism of the individual. We have no other problem in life except this self-assertive principle in us. Over-enthusiasm in any direction can mislead us into the notion that we are free from this evil. While we can be caught by engrossments in external objects, which is usually the case with many people in the world, we can also be caught by the ego, like a serpent from inside. A person who is free from attachment to objects can be a devilish ego from inside. And one who is trying to free himself from the ego within may enter the oceanic flood of sense objects outside. So we can be under the pressure of the external phenomena called objects, or the internal phenomenon called the ego. No one has escaped both of these. Either we are caught here, or we are caught there. There is a double tollgate, and if we escape one, we get caught in the other. We cannot escape them both.

Likewise, in our practice of religion, philosophy and spirituality, we are likely to make the mistake of not taking into consideration the impact that can be produced on us by these two aspects of natural evolution: the objects outside and the ego within. Both these are *prakriti* and *purusha* acting in two different ways. Objects are a form of *prakriti*; the ego is a form of *purusha*. The ego is not *purusha* and the objects are not *prakriti*, yet they have some connection with these two. *Purusha* misconstrued and located within the mind is the ego. *Prakriti*, misconstrued and located in space-time is an object. *Prakriti* cannot cause

bondage by itself, nor can *purusha* cause bondage by itself. But we limit both these and create a new circumstance called individuality. My individuality is a mixture of *prakriti* and *purusha* – a little of *prakriti* and a little of *purusha*. The little *prakriti* is this body and the little *purusha* is this ego. Both these have come together and created a new household.

To extricate ourselves from this real samsara, to free ourselves from this bondage of householdership in this body is real Sannyasa. Sannyasa is difficult to understand. It is freedom from the householder's life, but we are householders as long as we are in this body, because ego is the father and *prakriti* is the mother. They produce children in the form of the senses and pranas. I am not telling you a new philosophy; I am just repeating to you what Sage Vasishtha told Rama in the Yoga-Vasishtha.

Samsara is not outside, even as moksha is not outside. Bondage is not outside, even as freedom is not outside. Humanity is not outside, even as God is not outside. They are a set of circumstances. Humanity is not a group of individuals; it is a set of circumstances that are called humanity. So is bondage, so is freedom, so is even God-consciousness. It is a condition of being. It is not a process. It is not a reality somewhere. Inasmuch as we live under conditions and we aspire for a condition, a state of affairs, a state of being, whatever we have to do has to be done at the spot where we are sitting. It does not require physical movement and it does not require any kind of transformation in space, time and objects. It is a religion of being, and not a religion of either externals or internals.

We have four kinds of religion in this world, corresponding to the four approaches or faculties or situations in our own lives. We have the instinct and the sentiment aspect in us, which is of course a very predominant aspect, as we all know very well. We are not always intellectualising or rationalising things. We have sentiments, feelings and emotions. We may understand one thing, but feel something else. Our feeling may be for something different than what our understanding accepts. Thus, we have an aspect of sentiment, feeling, emotion – instinct, as it is called. Then there is another aspect in us – the aspect of will, determination, conduct, regulation, order or ethics, as it is usually called. There is a third aspect of love. No one can exist without loving something, and that has to find an avenue of expression. The last one is intelligence, rationality, understanding, logical faculty, discernment. These four sides find expression in what we call the four types of religion.

We have the lowest sentimental religion called totemism, fetishism, etc., which is prevalent not only among primitive types; even among intelligentsia it is present in some respect. Even the highest intellectual has certain totemic aspects, and fetish persists in him, lying in ambush behind his genius of understanding and scientific rationality. So, we have totemic religions of the tribes and the aboriginals, what we usually call instinctual religion. It is the religion of basic sentiments, where we simply act on a religious basis, founding our religious conduct on a certain sentiment only, a kind of social acceptance and tradition. It has no rationality behind it, and no questions can be asked.

And it has nothing to do with ethics even; there is no question of a special feeling for a code of conduct, etc.

There are religions of ethical behaviour that are purely ethical religions which insist on the social conduct as well as personal conduct, much more than anything else. There are religions which insist upon love and a feeling for others as well as a feeling for the supernatural as the pre-eminent. There are, finally, the rational or mystical religions which will not accept anything that is not acceptable to reason, and which are founded on experience.

So, corresponding to the four faculties or aspects of human personality, we have the four religions of fetish, ethics, theistic affection and love for all, and rational mysticism. But these are not watertight compartments. It is not that I can be a mystic minus rationality, or that I can be theistic minus the mystic element in me. I cannot be this or that, just as I cannot be merely a body or a soul or an intellect or a feeling or a will. I am a blend of all these, so that I am everything at all times.

Therefore, in the practice of the religious attitude we have to be very cautious that we do not lean upon any particular sentiment in us and call ourselves as a moralist, or ethicist, mystic, rationalist, socialist, reformer, etc. Religion is nothing of this kind. It is the whole being in us responding to the whole which is Reality. As there is no such thing as partitioning Reality, there is no such thing as partitioning human individuality. It is a miniature cosmos called the human individual. It is a cosmos, though it is a miniature. We should not forget it is a universe by itself, and we know what the universe contains; nothing is excluded from it. There is every blessed thing in me, in you,

in everyone. So whatever is in us has to be paid its due; it has to be summoned to task and set in tune with the total or the whole of Reality. It is the whole of me that is yearning for the whole that is everywhere.

But if the whole of me is not coming to the surface of action, I cannot be a real religious person. I can only be a sectarian, a cultist, a person who belongs to a faith, a group which is likely to be set in opposition to other faiths; that is the danger of religious dogma. By summoning only certain aspects of our personalities and deifying them into an apotheosis of what we call a cult or a creed, we set ourselves in opposition to other such formations of similar creeds and cults called religions. So, one religion is different from another religion, just as one aspect of our personality may differ from another aspect.

The quarrel between one religion and another religion is something like the quarrel of the eye with the nose, or the nose with the ears. If the eye cannot hear and the ear cannot see, naturally they cannot be friends; but we know how friendly the two are. The ear only hears and the eye only sees. Is there any quarrel, religious warfare between the two? So why is there warfare outside in social life? There is a central government of the psychophysical constitution which governs the function of the ear, eye, etc., irrespective of the fact that they are totally different and there is practically no connection between one and the other.

So, there is lacking in us a fundamental concept in life which is the reason for quarrels of every kind, disagreements of every type – social, political, religious. If I cannot agree with you in anything, it means I am not a religious person. I must agree with you in everything.

Though I may differ from you, I agree with you because while the apparent division marks off one individual from another and we have what we call society, the agreement creates the atmosphere of unity among us. Though individuals are many, mankind is one; humanity is single. Though the limbs of the body are many, the person is one. So this person that is one is the aspiring individual, and is the religious person. It is not my intellect that is religious, or my feeling that is religious, or my will that is religious, or this or that aspect of me that is religious.

Therefore, until and unless the whole of one's being rises to the surface of this task of what is called religion, one cannot be religious. Until and unless the whole of us has risen to the surface for the whole of this task, we cannot contact Reality, and until we contact Reality, we cannot experience it. God cannot come unless we are religious, and we cannot be religious unless the whole of us is in action. But never are we entirely in action, so never can we be really religious, and never can we get God. It is very pitiable if this should be the state of affairs.

I do not want to digress too much, and harangue you about religion, philosophy or spirituality. I have only thought aloud, the way in which I am used to thinking, as I told you in the beginning. Unless the whole of you comes into action, the Whole that you are asking for cannot come. But mind you, you cannot bring the whole of you into action; either you think without feeling, or feel without thinking, or act without either, etc. But if you can succeed, miraculously, in bringing all the aspects of your personality into focus, and you – the real you – comes to the conscious

level of action, that is religious endeavour. God must come, here and now. Why not?