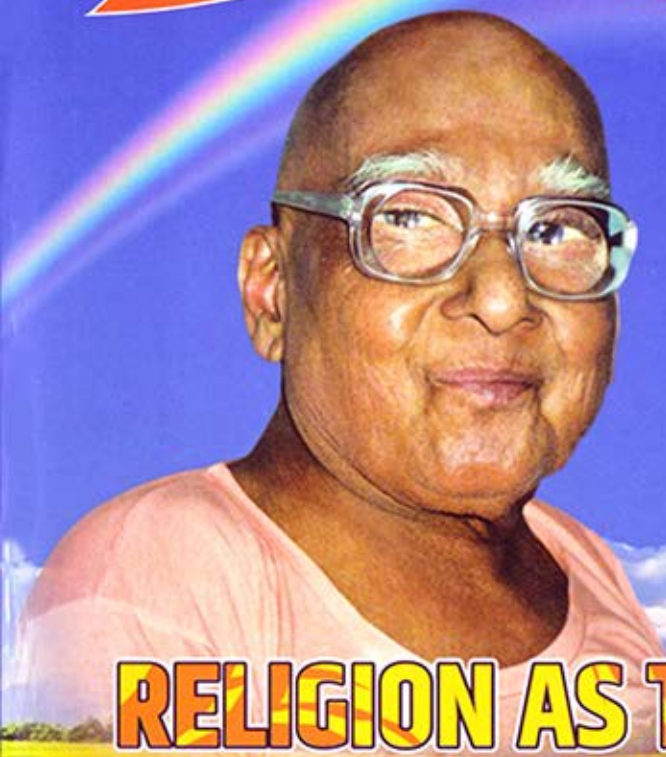




1922 CENTENARY SERIES 2022



# RELIGION AS THE PERFECTION OF LIFE

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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*Published by*

**THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY**

P.O. SHIVANANDANAGAR—249 192

Distt. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Himalayas, India

[www.sivanandaonline.org](http://www.sivanandaonline.org), [www.dlshq.org](http://www.dlshq.org)

First Edition: 2022  
[2,000 copies]

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**Swami Krishnananda Birth Centenary Series**

**FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION**

Published by Swami Padmanabhananda for  
The Divine Life Society, Shivanandanagar, and printed by  
him at the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy Press,  
P.O. Shivanandanagar, Distt. Tehri-Garhwal,  
Uttarakhand, Himalayas, India  
For online orders and catalogue visit: [www.dlsbooks.org](http://www.dlsbooks.org)

## **PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**Religion as the Perfection of Life**', consists of an illuminating discourse by Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj addressed to the students of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

# RELIGION AS THE PERFECTION OF LIFE

## The Definition of Religion

Philosophical studies would lead to the most important aspect of man's quest, viz., the phenomenon which goes by the name of religion. The soul of man pulsates with a throb and a resistless feeling, which cannot be equated with any other experience in the world, when he contemplates the meaning and the requirements of religion. It has been seen that the structure of the universe is such that it evokes a reaction from man, which is integral in nature. We do not project forth a partial reaction in our relation to the universe, because we seem to wholly belong to it. The whole reaction of the whole man to the whole universe is religion. Here is a truth, which would stimulate one into a new kind of activity, of a character which is far superior, in its quality, to any kind of engagement with which one may be occupied in the work-a-day world. It also would follow from this observation that religion

includes the whole of life, and not merely a segment of life, because, here, in this quest, the whole of man is involved, and not a part of him. Since the whole of man is involved in religion, the whole of life is involved in it. This is another important aspect which cannot be forgotten, but, unfortunately, is always lost sight of in the din of the world. Religion is generally not associated with the whole of one's life; it is kept in the pockets and pulled out only when one enters a temple, goes to a church, or sits before a holy saint. This is the religion man has mostly today. Only, it is far from the truth of religion. Religion is not a commodity that can be carried with us as a baggage. It is, to emphasise again, the whole attitude of man to the whole of the universe, or, rather, to the whole of reality in which process everything that is called life has to be included, and nothing can be outside its purview.

### **The Religious Consciousness: (a) Holism**

The development of the consciousness of religion in man, is also an interesting and wondrous process. While the whole of man is evoked into action when the universe calls him, there are degrees of wholeness in his personality. This should explain the degrees in the experience of the religious consciousness. It

is not that every religious person has an identical type of experience at all times. While it is to be accepted that religion demands nothing but a wholeness from man, it is also to be conceded that this wholeness reveals itself in levels of expression, and not at one stroke. There are examples of levels of wholeness in the growth of the human personality. When man is a baby, he is a whole individual; when he is an adolescent, he is a whole individual; when he is an adult, he is a whole individual; when he is a grown-up, mature person, he is still a whole individual; when he becomes old also, he is a whole individual. There is a particular degree of wholeness revealed when he is a baby, another degree when he is an adult, and so on.

In the West, there is prevalent a philosophy known as Holism. Though the word is spelt in this way, what is intended is "wholism". This was a type of discovery, or, one may say, invention of the thinker, General Smutts. The point that is made out is that everything evolves as a whole, and not as a part. There is no such thing as a partial evolution of anything in this universe. An atom is a whole; a plant is a whole; a tree is a whole; an animal is a whole; a human being is a whole; the solar system is a whole. Lower wholes emerge and enlarge into



more inclusive wholes. An organisation is a whole which is constituted by parts known as individuals; yet, each individual is a whole in himself or herself. Every cell of the body of each individual also is a whole in itself. The individual is a whole; the family is a whole, which is formed of whole individuals. The community is a whole, the nation is a whole, and the entire mankind is also a completeness in itself. So, even when certain parts seem to be collaborating with a whole to which they belong, they are a wholeness in themselves, nevertheless. The rise of levels into higher and higher forms of completeness is an ascent of the whole from its lower degrees to higher degrees. These are some of the results that would follow from the principles of Holism in evolution.

### **The Religious Consciousness: (b) Emergent Evolution**

The Emergent Evolution Theory is portrayed in a magnificent work 'Space, Time and Deity', a collection of lectures delivered by Samuel Alexander. Alexander argues on the basis of the Theory of Relativity of Einstein, primarily, but ascends to a religious level when he posits the necessity of a Deity operating behind every level of evolution,

or every stage of progress in the movement of the lower category to the higher one. The Deity, in the language of this author, is a name that is given to the force that pulls the lower level to the higher. What urges a baby to become an adult? What is that power? What is that impulse? What is that peculiar something which transforms the wholeness of a baby into the wholeness of the adult? This impulse is called the 'nisus' in evolution.

To Alexander, the universe, in its lowest astronomical form, is a complex of space and time. From space-time, there evolved a set of qualities, which we may call dimension in the geometrical sense. The primary qualities, which evolved out of the space-time complex, constitute the physical universe. The physical universe is impersonal originally, because there was no person in the beginning. The individual's perceptions are the secondary qualities wrested out of the impersonal form of the universe constituted only of the primary qualities. When individuality is revealed out of the impersonal cosmos, the initial unit recognisable as an entity, in the form of an atom, for instance, organises itself into molecules and, further, larger organic formations which are visible to the eyes as individuals, gradually developing into the plant

kingdom, rising later to the animal level, and finally completing itself in the human stage. But the human level is not the really completed stage, because the urge that pulls the lower to the higher, viz., from the inorganic level to the organic form of the plant, and from the plant level to the animal level, and from animal to man, is still working for a further upward ascent.

The 'nissus' is the urge impersonal, which is present behind every particular impulse in the universe, keeping everything restless at every moment of time, never allowing a quiet to anything, pulling everything higher and higher, urging it onward. This 'nissus' is present everywhere, right from the lowest atom to the highest stellar organisations. Man is not the completion of creation, because the 'nissus' is still operating in him, and, so, he is dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction in regard to the finitude of man, on account of which he is struggling still, like a plant reaching up for sunlight, is indication enough that there is a level higher than the human. The Deity is struggling to reveal itself in a more complete form than is available at the human level. Though it may be said that man is superior to the lower levels, he is still lower to the further possible levels above.

The Deity is not a person. It is a force; it is an urge; it is an impulse; it is a necessity; it is an aspiration. It is impossible of definition, and that impossible something is working in everyone. It is impossible to conceive it, because it is not confined to any particular individual's localised body or individuality. It is present everywhere. Inasmuch as it is working uniformly and universally in everything, at all times, no individual can conceive it wholly through the mind or the intellect. The universe is urging itself upward, pulling itself onward, towards a recognition of a perfection which alone can be called the Supreme Deity. Every next higher level is Deity to the lower. Much earlier, Plato proclaimed the degrees of the Idea of the Good. There seems to be some point in the adoration of many gods, though there is only One God. The degrees of reality explain the mystery.

### **Ishta Devata: The Chosen Deity**

There is, especially in India, a concept called Ishta-Devata, a Sanskrit word which means the 'beloved chosen deity'. The chosen deity is actually the wholeness of the religious ideal which one has placed before oneself as a totality beyond which the mind cannot reach. The God of religion is the totality

transcendent to which the mind, at the present level of its evolution, cannot conceive anything. This final reach is the Ishta Devata. The diversity of gods that are generally spoken of in religious circles is due to the degrees of the ideal which different minds, at different stages of evolution, place before themselves. Manifold worships are facets of the single crystal of the whole which is religion. While the supreme ideal of religion cannot be more than one, yet, it can be approached through various levels of this wholeness. These different levels of wholeness are the Ishta-Devatas, the deities, which each one considers as one's sole object. This object is not just one among many others; it is 'the object', and one cannot think of any other ideal then. It is 'the object' which includes every other possible concept of objects. The Devata, or the deity one has as the ideal, is the total of the objective concept, and, very important to remember, again. There are no objects outside this object that one has chosen as the deity; there cannot be another God outside one's God. It is so because of the fact that, here, the mind has reached the pinnacle of its possibility in the conception of Godhead, and once it has reached the apex of its possibility, it cannot go further beyond. So, the deity, as far as anyone is concerned,

is the highest possibility of mind or understanding in its grasp of the totality of the religious ideal. Thus, outside it nothing can be, naturally. The mind is not accustomed to think in this manner usually, and it is rightly held that one requires the guidance of a superior who has trodden this path, who knows the pitfalls on the way, and who can point to the path on which to direct the religious aspiration.

### **The Role of the Preceptor**

Here is an occasion to consider the relationship between the Preceptor, the Guru, and the disciple. The Guru is a 'whole' and not a person before the disciple. To the disciple, the Guru is not one individual among other individuals, not one person among many other persons. The Preceptor is a deity before the disciple; he is the next higher stage of deity. It is a wholeness that is possible, the only possible wholeness above the level of the disciple. Therefore, no one can have two Gurus, because there cannot be two wholenesses conceivable at the same time. The question of having more than one Guru arises on account of a partial understanding of this subtle requisition called discipleship. When the Deity of religion, or the Guru of the disciple, becomes an 'external' object, fanaticism and dogma

may replace the otherwise lofty ideal of the Deity being a 'total whole', not 'an object', which feature also should explain the relation between the Preceptor and the disciple.

### Religion Is an Experience

Inasmuch as religion requires the whole of man, it is difficult to live a life of true religion. No one would easily be prepared to rouse into activity every part of one's personality, all at once. Man remains a partial individual. When he speaks, he speaks partially; he thinks partially; his reaction to anything in the world is not entire; how could he be adequately religious? Religion is failing and crumbling, and we hear the complaint that it is today on the verge of destruction.

Man is not prepared to live a religious life because it requires a sacrifice on his part, which is not to the liking of the ego and the sense-cravings. Religion is a sacrifice (*yajno vai vishnuh*). It is a dedication of self. Religion is not exhausted in an offering of some object to a conceptual God. It is not a ritual that one performs in a social sense. Though religion can take a social form sometimes, and at times even a political form, as a matter of necessity, essentially it is neither; nor is it capable of subjection to formal

logic. It eludes the grasp of intellectual analysis. It is something which consists purely in experience, and hence it cannot be explained in empirical terms. Religion is the highest experience possible in man, the plumbing into the depths of one's own soul, in which act one comes in contact with the very essence of the cosmos, because this Deity that is mentioned, the 'nisus' as Alexander calls it, or the urge which is spiritual—that is, the uniform impulse present in all things in the universe, the call of the Infinite—is the deepest essence of anything. When man plumbs into the depths of his own being, he spontaneously comes in contact with the roots of all things. Religious experience is tantamount to cosmic experience in a very important way. It is not an exhilaration that one privately feels within oneself. Religion is not an emotion. Nor is it a psychic phenomenon. It is impossible to describe it in available expressions. It surpasses the limitations not only of language, but also of the rules and regulations of society and the traditions of behavioural norms.

This is a faint picture of the grandeur of religion, and also the difficulty of practising it. The glory and majesty of it is also the intricacy of its meaning. This is the voice of the great prophets of religion, which was faintly grasped by their followers, because,



when the prophets speak, the Spirit illumines itself as a blaze of light. What the followers hear may be a word or a phrase, while the Spirit is not to be imitated, but lived. There is often a difference between the intention of the founder, or the prophet, and the form which the teaching is made to take later through the descent of centuries. The prophets speak with a vision of God, by an experience which is commensurate with an encounter of the whole universe. The different religions the world knows today owe their origin to the geographical, ethnic and social differences among people. The sweetness of sugar is not to be equated with its colour and outer shape.

### **Religion is the Whole of Life**

The progression of the religious consciousness from level to level is an ascent of wholes. This is a feature which should be borne in mind always, if one is to be truly religious. Whenever one feels like contemplating a religious objective in meditations or in prayer, one has first of all to be assured in one's own self that the whole self is there ready to encounter all reality. The religious requirement is more than performing a duty that is incumbent on a person. Religion is not a social duty that man is

expected to carry out by outward mandate. Nobody has asked anyone to be religious by force. Man has to be religious in his own self, not that others have expected him to be alien to his nature. The human individual is basically religious because of the very structure of his being, the nature of his personality, and the type of relationship that obtains between him and the universe. Man cannot but be religious.

People can deny the validity of religion as if it is a profession to which one can cling, or which one can throw out at will. Religion is cried down these days by an erroneous interpretation of the secularist attitude. The travesty of affairs seems to be that religion has been deprived of its soul, and its lifeless skeleton parades as the aim of spiritual pursuits. No one, naturally, would have an attraction for a mechanised scaffolding bereft of vitality. The unfortunate dissatisfaction that a section of humanity is likely to evince in regard to religion may be attributed to the devitalised form of religion that struts in the form of the popular 'isms' of mankind, which are parochial segmentations of the social outlook of man, and which are mostly a far cry from the spirit of religion. To be able to live without religion would be to be able to live without a soul. Religion is the language of the spirit in man.

It is the urge of the soul within, the response of the whole that is man to the call of the Absolute.

Religion is the whole of man responding to the whole of reality. If this is forgotten, religion fails; then, one would feel that one's feet are not touching the ground. When one enters the religious consciousness, in any degree whatever, one gets transported totally. The soul is in a state of rapture. One is then in a large sea of delight because the whole that is above is trying to pull one out from the lower levels in which one is encased. It is as if the pith of one's individuality is being drawn out of its shell. Whatever image or description we can employ in understanding this process of the rise of one's being into the levels of religion, we will find that words cannot touch the spirit. No prophet has endeavoured to describe the universal dimension of religion in its essentiality, except in terms of the requirements of a particular time historically, or of a place geographically. The universal can be comprehended only by itself.

If one is sincere in his own self, if the pursuit of philosophy and religion, spirituality or Yoga, is honest to the core, one would not afford to waste one's time with the tinsels of pursuits for mundane appearances that pass for the solids of possession.

It has been seen that religion includes the whole of life and not merely a part of it. Since whatever is this world is also a part of life, all this that one sees around becomes a part of religion, so that man's life is never, at any moment, an irreligious drudgery. There can be no irreligious moment in life. In the light of the truth that religion is that magical touch which is given to the apparently diversified forms of life that one lives in the world, such a thing as an irreligious moment cannot be there. It is said that a philosopher's stone converts iron into gold. Even so is the touch that the religious consciousness imparts to the forms of man's life. What is called life is outwardly a scattered chaos of particulars, a hotch-potch of many things that one cannot easily reconcile oneself with or coordinate. But life gets transmuted into impersonal joy when it receives this touch of the religious magnetism.

Logic fails when religion begins, because the intellect has very little to do in this reaction of the totality of man to the totality of the universe, for the intellect is not the whole man. The seeker is now concerned with the whole man, and not merely a part of him, or a faculty which is purely psychological. In religion one does not restrict oneself to the intellect, or the mind, the feeling, the

emotion or whatever may be the sense-oriented functions of the psychic organ. Man is not merely the organs, or even the sum-total of all organs. He is something more than what the organs can connote, even in their collectiveness. Religion, when it takes possession of man, pulls him wholly from his partial entanglements in the titbits of the world of mind and sense. He is dragged out of a mire when the religious consciousness inundates him. One has to move carefully and slowly when one proceeds along this path which is precipitous, sharp, subtle, and yet supremely absorbing.

It is known that the human body is made up of small cellular structures. By a study of physiology, it is known that man, as a physical body, is a composite of particulars. But the particulars are all charged into a single integrated completeness by a thing called man's awareness of himself. The "I-am" that one is, is the living touch that is imparted to these otherwise scattered particulars of the limbs of the body. Notwithstanding the fact that the body is made up of bits of physiological substance, everyone is, yet, one living, vital, significant wholeness of individuality. This possibility arises on account of there being something called the "you", or the "I", in everyone. This "you", or the "I", is the seed of

religion. This is an example which would explain the way in which man has to transform the whole of his life into a religious dedication and worship. Even as an indescribable awareness of the "I" within man gives him a sense of totality and integrality, the consciousness of the religious ideal, viz., the universality of being, has to bring together the whole of man's life, irrespective of its particularities, into a total of religious aspiration. Such is religion, and such is the meaning of life; such is the task before everyone, and such is the sincerity and the effort that one has to put forth to achieve this only goal of the life of the universe.

### **Purusharthas: The Fourfold Purpose of Existence**

That religion includes the whole of life—and, therefore, it is not merely one of the functions that man performs among many others as his vocation—is the crux of the whole matter, a point which is easily overlooked by enthusiasts of religion. This vital fact was borne in mind by the ancient adepts of India, who brought about such a transformation in their outlook of life that they felt a necessity to introduce a system of living according to which life becomes religion, and religion becomes life. This system is embodied in the concept of what is known

as the Purusharthas, meaning thereby the aims of human existence.

There is a fourfold concept which includes the four facets of human longing, human desire, human aspiration, and human enterprise, all which are brought together into the focus of the attention of the religious student. When it is said that religion comprises the whole of life, it becomes necessary to understand what is meant by the whole life. Life may be defined as a kind of reaction of the individual to the outer atmosphere—an atmosphere which is at once social, personal, physical, and superphysical. All the aspects of life, which are the concerns of man, should be regarded as needs to be transformed into the religious endeavour. This is, again, something interesting and important. Whatever be man's occupation in life, that has to become the religion, that has to become a way to God, that has to get transformed into a worship of the Divine Ideal. This is so because religion is the encounter of the total individual in regard to the totality of the cosmos: Inasmuch as this is the truth, the whole of life has to be harnessed into the religious enterprise. The facets of life, while they can be manifold, may be grouped under four categories. These are the Purusharthas, or the principal aims of life, for which one works

hard every day, and which are the principal concerns throughout one's earthly sojourn; these are Artha (material need), Kama (emotional need), Dharma (ethical need), and Moksha (spiritual need).

### **Artha: The Material Requirements of Life**

Man experiences a reaction in respect of the environment around which he seeks the fulfilment of his material needs; these may be called one's economic needs. Anything that is essential for physical existence, without which man cannot live in this world, becomes an object of his pursuit, and his life in the world is, to that extent, inseparable from it. This inviolable law operating in the physical universe, according to which one is urged to work hard for the material and economic amenities in life, is a facet of life which is called Artha. Food, clothing, shelter are some of the ostensible forms which this pressure of life takes. Man has to work for this purpose, for the daily bread that he requires, for the clothings he has to put on, and the shelter that he needs for security. This is an important requirement indeed—the material necessities of life, the creature comforts, so-called. This urge towards the acquisition of material requirements is also to be transformed into a religious discipline, because



religion is the whole of life, and here is a part of its demands. Even if one works for one's bread, in a factory, in a school or a college, it is religion that one is living, for material forces are one pedestal in the gamut of ascent to Reality. Anna is Brahma, says the Upanishad. Matter is one rung in the ladder of development into the spirit of the cosmos. There is nothing unspiritual in a world animated by a universal consciousness, with which every individual is inextricably related. The word 'secular', as meaning the 'unspiritual', cannot exist in the dictionary of creation.

### **Kama: The Emotional Needs of Man**

Together with the material requirements of man, which are economic in their nature, he has other longings within, which also constitute a part of his life. He cannot be satisfied merely with bread, clothing, and a house to live in. Even if man has all these, he would still be in search of something else. This is because man is a complex of different layers of involvement. There are aesthetic desires. There is an impulse for love and appreciation of beauty. This cannot be regarded as an unimportant aspect of life. Its voice is as vehement and pressing as the call for material comfort. Man is stimulated

by the impulse for beautiful things. The attraction for fine arts and literature is an outer form which this inward impulse for aesthetic enjoyment takes in him. Man has a vital desire apart from a physical need. He loves, and expects love. This impulse also has to be converted into a religious experience and performance. Man's vital satisfactions and fulfilment of emotional needs are a part of his religious life. Else, his existence becomes segmented and partial, and not a whole which religion ought to be. The aesthetic impulse is called Kama, usually translated as desire. Kama, while it can be regarded as any kind of love or longing, is essentially a vital urge which has many expressions. The romantic impulse; the aesthetic impulse; the love for order, system, beauty, regularity and perfection; all these come under the category of Kama. Its major thrust is, however, in the impetuosity of the sexual hunger in the individual, which manifests itself as the many forms of conditioned appreciation of beauty.

Everyone knows well how forceful desire is, and what a role it plays in one's life. The impulses have their visible expressions as well as hidden forms. The ancient seers were very clear in their understanding of the nature of human psychology. There was, in India, no ban imposed on the natural fulfilment

of desires, contrary to the dictates of certain over-austere religious attitudes which emphasise to a point of excess mortification of the flesh, the starving of desires, and a hibernation of one's normal impulses. India has not gone that way, because the original incentive behind all desire is the Divine Call. This is the reason why even the ordinary daily occupations and instinctive impulsions are regarded as raw materials for purification and intelligent harnessing along the stages in the evolution of the spirit towards Godhead. Every form of desire, and every impulse within man towards anything, has, at its root, the touch of a beckoning that comes from God Himself. Desire, whatever be its nature, and whatever the form it takes in life, can be traced, though by a zig-zag movement, to a summons from the Eternal. If God were not to call man, there would have been no desires in life. Every desire is some distorted shape which the response of man to God takes in this world. When the individual expresses a desire, he is responding to the call of God, though in an ignorant and misconceived way. This was well appreciated by the Masters, and they felt that it is not only possible, but also necessary to transform the desires into a religious and a spiritual technique. Desires are to be channelised, sublimated, and

turned back to their original source, from the present reflected, contorted shape which they have taken in their ill-calculated relationship with an external world. A desire, while it is apparently directed towards the fulfilment of an objective satisfaction, actually arises from a need for universal experience. It is not the object that is calling man when he desires something. It is, rather, the universal that is speaking to him. But, as he is placed in space and time, and the space-time complex externalises even the universal; God Himself appears as an object of sense. That is why the divine aspiration to return to God takes the form of a desire for an unrelated object. Man is innocent essentially, but he looks like a devil when he co-operates, due to lack of proper education, with this externalising impulse which pulls him in the direction of localised objects, rather than towards the original universality of existence. This truth of life is the reason why the ancient seers formulated a scheme of living, according to which physical and vital desires can and must be transformed into a spiritual discipline.

### **Dharma: The Ethical Law of Rectitude and Justice**

But, this permission and concession given to the desires to fulfil themselves is to be conditioned by

a great rule or law, called Dharma. If Dharma, the principle of the righteousness of the law, does not regulate the operation of desires, they cease to be aids in the movement of the spirit towards God. Regulated desire is not an obstacle. It is, rather, the dynamo that pumps energy into the human system and enables man to live a healthy life of constructive activity. Waters of a river, which are accumulated by the construction of a dam, can be either utilised for the beneficial purpose of agriculture, or they may burst forth into a destructive activity, damaging villages and killing people. Even so with desires, which are like flowing rivers, and which get dammed up when they are bottled inside the individuality of a man. They are intended for focussing the mind and concentration of it for driving the individual towards the Universal Reality, and not to be dissipated in any grossly outward movement of the urge for unmitigated indulgence of a spatio-temporal character.

Dharma is law, righteousness, virtue, or a regulative principle, which harmonises everything with everything else. The individual cannot escape a little of selfishness because of the affirmation of the individuality which is turbulent. There is an urge within everyone to maintain one's own self to the

detriment of others, a form which desire takes when it is concentrated within the body and ignores the presence of other individuals of a similar nature. Dharma, or law, insists that desire can be fulfilled, but not to the disadvantage of others who also exist in this world, and who too have a similar permission to fulfil their desires. "Do unto others as you would be done by. Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to yourself." If one wishes that everything should belong to oneself, everyone else also can entertain a similar wish. If everyone wishes to have everything for one's own self, what would be the result? There would be chaos and destruction. Law is the principle of cooperation in life as against competition, conflict, battle and war. It is the concession which each individual is expected to make in respect of every other individual in the world, because the world is a 'Kingdom of Ends,' and not a restless flow of 'means' only. Each individual has a status of his own, or her own, or its own, and no individual is a means to another individual. Exploitation is not permitted by the very structure of the world. No one can utilise another for one's own purpose, or satisfaction. Desire, whatever be its nature, has a peculiar trait of exploiting others. Whenever a desire arises in man, he has a subtle

inkling to utilise others for the fulfilment of that impulse. And when the desire becomes intense, violent, and takes the form of an unruly passion, it may wholly ignore the welfare of others, and may even tend towards the other form of it, namely a desire to destroy. To prevent such a possible catastrophe, a regimentation has to be introduced into one's life.

In the Bhagavadgita, there is a reference to this principle of the permission given for the fulfilment of desire provided it is not contrary to law: *Dharmaviruddho bhuteshu kamosmi*, "I am that desire in man which is not against the operation of law, which is in conformity with the principle of righteousness." What is righteousness? What is law, and what is Dharma, which has to condition desire, and in harmony with which desire is permissible in life? In the Veda, there are two significant terms used: Satya and Rita. Satya is the law of the Absolute. Rita is the very same law operating in the cosmos as a regulative principle, immanent in all things. And every law that man can think of in his mind is a fraction of this cosmic Law which is rooted in the integrality of the Universal. There is a necessity to introduce a system of coherence among the visible particulars, so that they form a harmonious whole, a

hierarchy of completeness, and not a mess of jarring notes without any relation among themselves. The individuals in the cosmos are not really scattered particulars. They are integral parts of a whole, orderly arranged in an hierarchical fashion, controlled by the supreme indivisibility of God's perfection. The universality of God is the reason behind the need to implement a law of harmony among the individualities in the world. Law exists because God exists, and law is the way in which God's Indivisible Being manifests Itself through space and time. It is the cementing factor in life, bringing together isolated forms into an integral whole.

The mandate, or the imperative, that man has to fulfil the righteousness of the law is also a part of the requirement of all life. It is not true that life consists merely in the fulfilment of material needs and the acquirement of vital satisfaction. Yes, they are permitted, no doubt. But, it is a permission under the law operating everywhere, uniformly. Artha, Kama, Dharma, are the three terms signifying the three facets of the approach of man to God in terms of his relationship in the universe and in human society. The well-graduated order of life as the student (Brahmacharin), householder (Grihastha), recluse (Vanaprastha), and the super-individual



sage (Sannyasin), is the scientific formulation of the way in which human impulses are to be trained for a dedication of time to eternity.

### **Moksha: The Spiritual Aim of the Universe**

Ultimately, the supreme aim of life is not the fulfilment of any desire, but the attainment of liberation, Moksha. The evolutionary process of the cosmos is the movement of all phenomena towards Self realisation, not of any given individual, but of all things uniformly. It is the Self realisation of the universe. The universe is struggling to become aware of its own existence as a total whole. The cosmos is endeavouring to regain its integrality in an all-inclusive Self awareness. Towards this end, every part of it is moving, like the parts of a machine when it is operating. The goal of life is the attainment of God, the realisation of the Absolute, the unity of the individual with the cosmos. This is Moksha. This is the final aim of all life. The other aims, viz., Artha, Kama and Dharma, are necessary contributory factors, the other building faces of this glorious consummation. Here, one has to strike a note of caution. When it is said that Moksha is the goal of life, one is likely, suddenly, to be transported to a peculiar kind of thinking that the aim is beyond

this world, and that it is not in this world. This is a subtle error that can creep into the intelligence of man on account of a temporal feature which is predominant in the very nature of human thinking. When one speaks of the liberation of the soul and the union of the individual in the Godhead, one may imagine that it is an 'other-worldly' affair. To remove this wrong notion, it has been reiterated that Artha and Kama form part of the means to be adopted for the realisation of the ideal. The world is transmuted, not denied, in the Infinite.

Religions, many a time, picture God as an extra-cosmic creator. This concept of God as transcendent has resulted often in a bifurcation of life into the religious and the secular. Life is condemned either as a devilish attraction for matter and flesh, a work of Satan, or an illusion which has to be shunned with the force of will, because Nirvana is the goal of life. Moksha is the aim of existence. Man tries to withdraw from the realities of the physical forms of life and turn an introvert who cannot recognise the immanence of God in the temporal process, but can adore only His transcendence. The culture of India is superb in this sense that it has kept in mind the possibility of man committing this error in his practice of religion. God is transcendent, yes,

because He is above space and time. But He is also immanent because the call of God, the presence of the Absolute, is reverberating through the medium of space and time. God is not merely outside man; He is also within. God is not only Brahman, The All, but also the Atman, the Self; Moksha is not a world above, a heaven beyond, and is not an after-death achievement. It is an experience here and now, spaceless and timeless. Life has to be lived in such a way that right from the lowest physical level up to the final spiritual state, it becomes a movement of consciousness through its gradual evolutionary unfoldment into perfection.

### **Ashramas: The Stages of Life**

Together with this concept of the Purusharthas—Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha—the ancients conceived a formula to regulate the life of the individual by implementing a system called the Ashramas, or stages of life: Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vanaprastha, and Sannyasa. Man has to pass through these stages in order that he may become a complete person, mature wholly. No stage of life can be ignored as an unnecessary or an irrelevant intrusion. Just as Artha, Kama, Dharma, Moksha are equally important in their own contexts,

though Moksha is the final goal, the four stages are all equally necessary. These Ashramas are the ways of living by which the four aims of life can be fulfilled in a healthy manner of self fulfilment.

Brahmacharya is the stage of studentship, of study under a Guru. It is the life of a scholar when he undergoes education in the knowledge of life, in its various manifestations of forms. Often, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha, the four aims of life, have been correspondingly related to the four stages. There is some sort of a relevance in this comparison; yet, they cannot be literally detailed in this manner, because it is held that, while in the stage of Brahmacharya one accumulates Dharma, while in the life of the Grihastha one fulfils the needs of Artha and Kama, and in the disciplines of Vanaprastha and Sannyasa one works for Moksha, it is also true that the four get blended into an inseparable whole, and the four stages of life are a graduated growth into full maturity. There is no comparison possible of one with the other. Orientalists and thinkers have not infrequently thought that Indian philosophy is a doctrine of world-negation. Far from it is the truth, as could be seen with a clearer insight. The introduction of the system of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha as constituting all life is the

proof of it. The necessity felt to induct these stages through which everyone has to pass logically is a demonstration of the Indian genius. India's culture never held that negation is the law of life; for its fulfilment is a state that has to be reached by working through the media of other disciplinary processes which are equally important. It would be odious to compare one stage with another, imagining that one is superior or inferior to the other. The stages of evolution do not brook comparison. Each stage becomes as important as any other, when one finds oneself in it. Religion, indeed, is the whole of life. It is an inward attunement of oneself with the cosmic requirement. The inwardness, being constituted of the different layers of personality, has to be taken into consideration in all its degrees when one lives a religious life. The inwardness is of a graded form. There is no sudden contact of one level with the rest of reality. Man, as an individual, is formed of several psychic vestures, each of which has to be paid its due, which is done by living the life of the four stages and the four aims. One's entire life, thus, becomes an approach to eternal beatitude.

The progression of the religious consciousness from level to level is an ascent of wholes. This is a feature which should be borne in mind always, if one is to be truly religious. Whenever one feels like contemplating a religious objective in meditations or in prayer, one has first of all to be assured in one's own self that the whole self is there ready to encounter all reality.

—SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



**A DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY PUBLICATION**