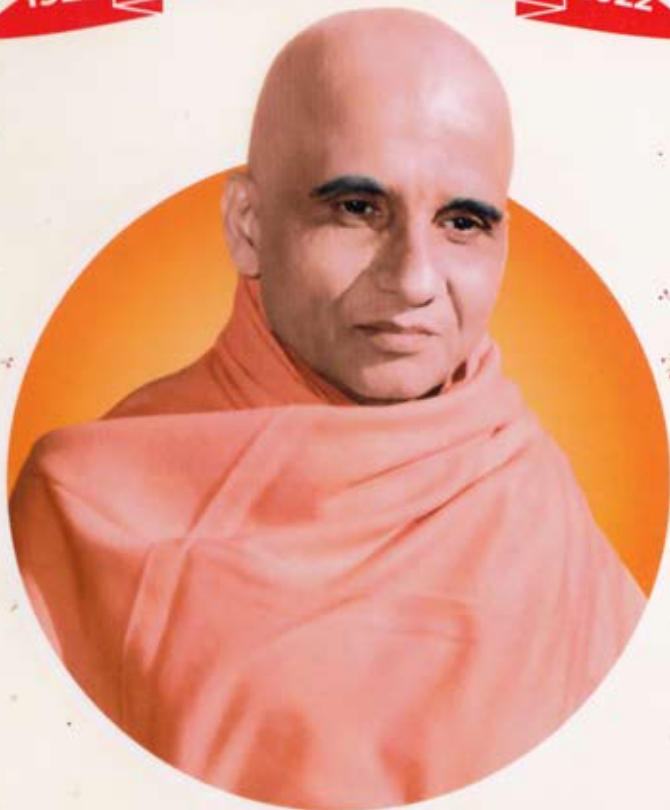




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What is Religion

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

WHAT IS RELIGION

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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, '**What is Religion**', comprises a message given by Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj on the eve of the New Year, the 31st of December, 1973.

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

WHAT IS RELIGION

The New Year is fast approaching and we will be in another year within a couple of hours. Years have come and years have gone. We have celebrated the ushering in of the New Year many a time, but we are no better than what we were many years back. Why so? Religion, which is supposed to help us in this respect, does not seem to be of much avail, because we have not understood what religion is. So let us now ponder over this very important subject: “What is religion?”

In a broad way, religion may be regarded as pure common sense. It is not a compulsion or an imposition that is inflicted upon one by people from outside. It is something which we cannot avoid, due to the very setup of things. We know there are certain things in life which we cannot avoid because of the circumstances under which we are placed. Sometimes people start saying, “What can I do? I cannot avoid it; the situation is such.” Sometimes we are placed under such circumstances that we have to do something, whether we like it or not, want it or

not. Likewise, religion is something which we are obliged to accept as something unavoidable, which we can never entirely turn a deaf ear to, under the conditions in which we exist in this world. As long as we are in this world, there is religion. And we shall be always in some world, which is a name we give to the universal atmosphere in all its planes or levels of expression. Thus, the world is not going to vanish. If religion can be defined as the duty that we owe to the Universe, then religion is eternal; it can never cease to be.

The other question that arises as a sort of corollary from this position is: "What is meditation?" The same answer holds good, in essence, for this question also. If we know what religion is, we will also know what meditation is, because meditation is nothing but the contemplation of the fact of religion. So, when religion is known, meditation also is known. The duty that we owe to the Universe is our religion. Can there be, then, many religions in the world? This question also is automatically answered in this small aphoristic answer: "Religion is the duty of man to the Universe."

Can there be many kinds of duty towards the Universe? This query can only be answered by an analogy. There is a family consisting of many

members—father, mother, brother, sister, children, and so on. Each member of the family owes a duty towards every other member of the family. Now, does this duty vary from member to member, or not? It varies, and it does not vary. Both answers hold good here. It varies in the sense that the capacity of each person is different from that of the other persons. It does not vary in the sense that it is the duty of each member of the family to work towards the fulfilment of the common purpose of the family. One member may wash the vessels every day. Another member may wash the clothes. A third member may go shopping. A fourth may receive visitors and guests, and a fifth may cook dinner. Now, these are all different functions which each member of the family performs. But, what is the purpose behind all these different activities or functions? It is to keep the solidarity of the family and to keep the family alive as a ‘whole’, and not to keep each individual member alive separately, like unconnected bricks in a heap. The family is not merely its members, but it is something more than each individual member, just as a government is not any governmental official, merely. Every official is a part of the government. Yet no single official can be said to be the government, as such. The government

is invisible to the eyes. You cannot see it anywhere. If you search for the government, you cannot see it. You will only see persons, and yet, all these persons put together do not make the government. Then what is the government? It is the 'principle' behind the operations of these people. The 'principle' is not seen, only the people are seen. You can see the President, you can see the Prime Minister, you can see the Ministers, and many others. All these people put together, as different individuals, also, do not constitute what you mean by government. The officials are the limbs of the organism or the body called the government.

In a similar manner, we may conceive and understand religion. So is also any kind of organisational setup—a society, for instance. An organisation is not people and buildings. Rather, it is a 'principle' which everything else has to subserve. There is a principle operating behind all the things that you see. This principle is the law, the nation, the cultural cohesion of kindred aspirations. This is government. This is society. This is organisation. This is family. This is religion, wherein the principle of organisational living reaches its cosmical climax.

There is also a principle operating behind the variegated duties that you owe to the Universe. This

principle is to be the object of your meditation. I said, when you know what religion is, then you know what meditation is. Meditation is the contemplation on the foundational principle of religion. Religion is a principle. Please remember this. It is not a formality. It is not a cult or a creed, or an action or an activity of individuals. It is a cementing force in human society, even as the governmental system cements the officials as well as the citizens. Hence, going to the temple, offering worship, reading the scriptures, doing charitable work, and rolling the beads—all these, while they look like religion, do not make religion as such, because religion is more a state of consciousness, outlook, feeling and attitude than a mere form bereft of this inner significance. Without the members, there is no family, and yet the members are not the family. This is an enigma behind the distinction between the principle and its manifestation.

Religion as a principle is invisible. And without the principle there cannot be religion. Behind all activity there is a policy, as you call it. “What is your policy?” people ask. You have seen activities, but what is the policy behind the activities? That is very essential. If that is missing, the activities lose sense. Likewise, your religion and your religious activities

will have no significance if there is no policy behind it. And what is this policy? Why do you do this in this manner and not the other way? The policy is to manifest your relationship to the Universe. The policy of the family is that each member of the family should manifest his or her relationship to the other members. Though the activity may vary in its shape and form, the relationship does not vary.

The child does a little work, the mother does something else and the father does a different kind of work. There is no superiority or inferiority in the work or duties here. The significance behind each one's activities is identical, which is all a love for what they call the family, though they cannot explain or define what family is. Patriotism, the spirit of love for the nation, is not love for any official of the government, or even for a set of persons. It is love for a principle behind what you call nationality or the national spirit. The 'national spirit' is different from the 'people of the country'. These are all difficult things to comprehend for an untrained mind. Likewise, an untrained mind cannot understand what religion is.

Now I come to the subject of religion, about which I said earlier, that your relationship to the Universe determines what your religion is. But

what is your relationship to the Universe? Can you tell me, what is your particular relationship to your family? You belong to the family in such a manner that you cannot be 'out' of it. Likewise, you belong to the Universe in such a manner that you are never 'outside' it even for a single moment. The good of the Universe is your good, even as the good of the family is the good of every member of the family, as the good of the nation is the good of every citizen, and as the good of the whole is the good of the parts. The good of the body, or the health of the body, is the good of every limb of the body. So, too, religion is not merely an activity of the limbs of the body or a group of people. It is not what you do with your hands and feet merely. It is an attitude that you develop in your consciousness. When you look at the world, what do you think of it? That is your religion.

When you gaze at the world, what is your opinion about it? That is your religion; not what you do in the temples and the churches. That is not sufficient religion, though it is a part of religion. It is just a manifestation of the spirit of religion. And the spirit of religion is your attitude. Thus, religion is an attitude of consciousness. It is not an activity or function that you perform, as an individual. It is a

general attitude of affection for the Whole to which you belong in the atmosphere of the Universe.

This is a highly philosophical problem, if you push it to its logical limits. It is a very crucial matter, determining our very life itself. If you have a chaotic attitude towards the Universe, you will have a chaotic religion, you will lead a chaotic life, and confusion will be the consequence. If you do not know what exactly is your relation to your family, you know what will happen to the family. There will be no family. It will be disintegrated. You stand together as one force when you say "I am from this family". Just as you have an integrated force called the family and another integrated force called the nation, you have an integrated force called humanity or mankind. When you speak of humanity, you speak of all mankind. Just as there is a force called mankind, a force called nation or family, there is a force called the Universe. This is essential to understand.

Now, to understand this, you need not go to the scriptures for reading. Pure common sense alone is enough. You cannot say that you are outside the Universe. You are in it, and you know what bounties you enjoy from it. You cannot live without the resources of Nature. You want water and air, you want

light and heat, you want food; and all these come from the Universe. Do you not contribute your mite to the maintenance of the family because the family supports you by providing you with education, food, medical aid, love and care, and helps you in all ways? Does each member not owe an obligation to the family which supports him? Likewise the Universe sustains us with food, water, air; the very breath that we breathe and our very existence is determined by it. Thank God, the planets do not dash against one another, crushing our heads. Suppose there is a collision of the planets, you can imagine what would happen to us. No such thing happens, and everything is wonderfully maintained. There is a system in the cosmos which protects us. It gives us training and education and enables us to be alive here. Do we not owe an obligation towards it? That is our religion.

Now, this obligation cannot vary in its spirit. That is what I am trying to point out. Though your functions may vary, the spirit behind them cannot vary. The child's attitude towards the family is the same as the attitude of the big father towards the family, though their functions are different. Likewise, you must look upon the Universe as a single family, where you owe an attitude of

cooperation, collaboration and non-exploitation in respect of everyone. You cannot exploit the family, for you know that is not good; that is not becoming of a member of the family. You should try to sustain it. Similarly, we should not exploit the world, or Nature as a whole. We should not exploit even God. That is not proper. Exploitation is always bad, wherever it is. The law of life is cooperation and not competition and exploitation. "We should not take what we have not given," to put it in simple language. Religion, in its highest form, is this great principle or policy, as explained.

In actual practice, in day-to-day life, religion takes the form of: "Do not take what you have not given." Whenever you take something from the world, please consider whether you have given something equally, in any form, to the world. If you have given nothing, take nothing. If you have taken one thing, you have to give one thing. Otherwise, the Universe will set up a revolt against you. When the Universe revolts against you, you know what will happen to you. You will not be there, for you will be pounded. Unfortunately, the Universe has already set up a revolution against us. That is why there is birth and death. The series of births and deaths is nothing but the punishment meted out to us by the law of

the cosmos for infringing its principles. You always regard the Universe as something outside you, as a foreigner, as a stranger, and you want to exploit it—nay, conquer it. You always talk of conquering Nature as if it is an enemy. Do you talk of conquering the family to which you belong? Never, is the answer. Then why do you talk of conquering Nature? Poor Nature, it is your own. Why do you want to conquer it? You are a part of it. Know this and act accordingly. Then, like a loving mother, Nature will come and take you on her lap. The Universe will sustain you. There is no fear in this world. Fear is unknown to the one who cooperates with the world. But, for the one who exploits, there is fear everywhere, and such a man cannot exist without fear and anxiety for a moment. If you are a good man, you will not exploit any person or individual, any facility that is provided to you, not even Nature and God. Religion is this conscious attitude of yours towards the Universe, philosophically, and in principle. And in practice, it is following the instruction: “Do not take more than what you give. Do not exploit, but cooperate.” Feel that you belong to the Universe, which is your family. It is better to remember the analogy of the family, so that you may know what your position in this world is.

There is something more, about which nothing need be specially said because it is implied. Just as there is a head of the family, there is a Head of this Universal Family. You cannot see Him easily. But you can see Him when you cooperate with His laws. The law will take you to Him. The law has also ordained that we shall have actual, direct contact with the Head of this Universal Family who is the creator of this cosmos. When this Universe takes care of you, it is implied that God Himself takes care of you. Religion is not yours, not mine, and it is not of the East or the West. There are not many religions. There is only one religion, in fact. It is a scientific principle that operates in the Universe. Religion is the greatest science. People ask, "Is religion scientific?" This is a stupid question because religion is the only science, ultimately, that is going to be successful in the world. There is no such question as whether religion is scientific; I say there is no other science. All other sciences are the children of this supreme science which goes by the name of religion, without which man cannot even exist in this world. Religion is metaphysical, philosophical, and psychological, ethical and practical, social, political, and everything. It permeates every fibre of our existence. It is the Supreme Law that operates

everywhere, governing men and women, young and old, every person, in all walks of life. It is an Eternal Law. It is the Law of God, the Law of Nature.

May this be your contemplation on the eve of the New Year, throughout the year, and also throughout your life. May this understanding of the real religion lead you to the realisation of the true God, is my prayer at this auspicious moment when the New Year is about to ring in.

The New Year is fast approaching and we will be in another year within a couple of hours. Years have come and years have gone. We have celebrated the ushering in of the New Year many a time, but we are no better than what we were many years back. Why so? Religion, which is supposed to help us in this respect, does not seem to be of much avail, because we have not understood what religion is. So let us now ponder over this very important subject: “What is religion?”

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