

The Essence of Religion

Talk by Sant Kirpal Singh, Feb. 26th, 1965, 3rd Conference of World Fellowship of Religions

All the religions agree that life, light and love are the three phases of the supreme source of all that exists. These essential attributes of the divinity that is one, though designated differently by the prophets and peoples of the world, are also wrought in the very pattern of every sentient being. It is in this vast ocean of love, light and life that we live, have our very being and move about and yet, strange as it may seem, like the proverbial fish in water, we do not know this truth and much less practice it in our daily life. And hence the endless fear, helplessness and misery that we see around us in the world in spite of all our laudable efforts and sincere strivings to get rid of them.

Love is the only touchstone wherewith we can measure our understanding of the twin principles of life and light in us and how far we have travelled on the path of self-knowledge and God-knowledge.

God is love. The soul in man is a spark of that love, and love again is the link between God and man on the one hand and man and God's creation on the other. It is therefore said: "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh says: "Verily I say unto thee, that he whose heart is bubbling over with love, he alone shall find God." Love, in a nutshell, is the fulfilment of the law of life and light.

All the prophets, all the religions and all the scriptures hang on two commandments:

"Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"

Questioned as to our attitude toward our enemies, Christ said: "Love thine enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your father in heaven. Be ye therefore perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect."

With the yardstick of love, the very essence of God's character, with us, let us probe our hearts. Is our life an efflorescence of God's love? Are we ready to serve one another with love? Do we keep our hearts open to the healthy influences coming from outside? Are we patient and tolerant toward those who differ from us? Are our minds coextensive with the creation of God and ready to embrace the totality of His being? Do we bleed inwardly at the sight of the downtrodden and depressed? Do we pray for the sick and suffering humanity? If we do not do any of these things, we are yet far removed from God and from religion, no matter how loud we may be in our talk and pious in our platitudes and pompous in our proclamations. With all our inner craving for peace, we have failed and failed hopelessly to serve the cause of God's peace on earth.

End and means are interlocked and cannot be separated from each other. We cannot have peace so long as we try to achieve it with war-like means and with the weapons of

destruction and extinction. With the germs of hatred in our hearts, racial and colour bars rankling within us, thoughts of political domination and economic exploitation surging in our bloodstream, we are working for wrecking the social structure which we have so strenuously built and not for peace, unless it be peace of the grave. But certainly not for a living peace born of mutual love and respect, trust and concord, that may go to ameliorate mankind and transform this earth into a paradise for which we so fervently pray and preach from pulpits and platforms and yet, as we proceed, it recedes away into the distant horizon.

Where then lies the remedy? Is the disease past all cure? No, it is not so. Life and light of God are still there to help and guide us in the wilderness. We see this wilderness around us because we are bewildered in the heart of our hearts and do not see things in their proper perspective. This vast outer world is nothing but a reflex of our own little world within us.

The seeds of discord and disharmony in the soil of our mind bear fruit in and around us and do so in abundance. We are what we think and see the world with the smoke-coloured glasses that we choose to put on. It is a proof positive of one thing only: That we have so far not known the life and light of God and much less realized God in man.

We are off centre in the game of life. We are playing it at the circumference only and never have a dip in the deepest waters of life at the centre. This is why we constantly find ourselves caught in the vortex of the swirling waters on the surface. The life at the circumference of our being is, in fact, not different from the life at the centre of our being. The two are, in fact, not non-identical, yet, when one is divorced from the other, they look dissimilar. Hence the strange paradox: The physical life though a manifestation of God is full of toil and turmoil, storm and stress, dissipation and disruption.

In our enthusiasm and zest for outer life on the plane of the senses, we have strayed too far away from our centre, nay, we have altogether lost sight of it. And worse still, have cut the very moorings of our barque and no wonder then we find ourselves tossing helplessly on the sea of life. Rudderless and without a compass to guide our course, we are unwittingly a prey to chance winds and waters and cannot see the shoals, the sandbanks and the submerged rocks with which our way is strewn. In this frightful plight, we are drifting along the onrushing current of life. Where? We know not.

This world, after all, is not and cannot be so bad as we take it to be. It is a manifestation of the life principle of the creator and is being sustained by His light. His love is at the bottom of all this.

The world with its various religions is made for us and we are to benefit from them. One cannot learn swimming on dry land. All that we have to do is to correctly learn and understand the basic life truths as are embodied in our scriptures, and practice them carefully under the guidance of some theocentric saint. These scriptures came into being by God-inspired prophets, and as such, some God-intoxicated person or a God-man can give us a proper interpretation of them, initiate us into their right import by reconciling the seeming discrepancies in thought and finally help us inwardly on the God-path.

Without such a practical guidance both without and within we are trapped in the magic spell of forms and minds, and cannot possibly reach at the esoteric truths lying under a mass of

verbiage of the bygone ages and now solidified into fossils with the lapse of time into institutionalized forms, formulae and formularies of the ruling class.

Every religion has of necessity a three-fold aspect:

First, the traditional, comprising myths and legends for the lay brethren.

Second, the philosophical treatises based on reason to satisfy the hunger of the intellectuals concerned more with the why and wherefore of things than anything else, with great stress on theory of the subject and emphasis on ethical development which is so very necessary for spiritual growth.

And third, the esoteric part, the central core in every religion, meant for the chosen few, the genuine seekers after Truth. This last part deals with the spiritual personal experiences of the founders of all religions and other advanced souls. It is this part, called spirituality, the core of all religions, that has to be sifted and enshrined in the heart for practice and experience.

These inner experiences of all sages and seers from time immemorial are the same, irrespective of the religious-social orders to which they belonged, and deal in the main with the light and life of God – no matter at what level – and the methods and means for achieving direct results are also similar. Religious experience, says Plotinus, lies in the finding of the true home by the exile, meaning the pilgrim soul, to whom the kingdom of God is at present just a lost province. Similarly, Henri Bergson, another great philosopher, tells us: "The surest way to truth is by perception, by intuition, by reasoning to a certain point and then taking a mortal leap."

These philosophers have said nothing new. They have just repeated in their own way the time-honoured ancient truths regarding Para Vidya, the knowledge of the beyond, the references to which in terse and succinct form we find in all the scriptures of the world. For example, in Christian theology we have:

1. "Learn to die so that you may begin to live." And St. Paul significantly adds: "I die daily."
2. "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall find it."

The holy prophet of Arabia speaks of "Mautu Kibal Ant Mautu", i.e., death before actual death. Dadu and other saints likewise say: "Learn to die while living, for in the end, of course, everyone has to die."

Thus we have seen that life and light of God constitute the only common ground at which all religions do meet and if we could take hold of these saving lifelines, we can become live centres of spirituality, no matter to what religion we owe our allegiance for the fulfilment of our social needs and the development of our moral well-being.

God made man and man in course of time made religions as so many vehicles for his uplift according to the prevailing conditions of the people. While riding in these vehicles, our prime need is to raise our moral and spiritual stature to such an extent as to come nearer to

God and this, it may be noted, is not merely a possibility, but as sure a mathematical certainty as two and two make four, with of course proper guidance and help from some adept well versed not only in theory but also in the practice of the science of soul.

It is not a province of mere philosophers or theologians or the intellectual great. I take just two instances to illustrate my point. God, according to all scriptures, is described as the Father of lights, Nooran-ala-noor, Swayam jyoti swarup, all of which are nothing but synonymous terms. But ask any religious authority as to the connotation of these words and he would say that these are only figurative terms without any inner significance. Why? Because he has not actually experienced in person His light, uncreated and immortal, self-effulgent and shadowless, which Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, Nanak, Kabir and others of their kind actually witnessed and realized, and taught those who came in contact with them to do likewise.

Again, like the practice of lightning candles, symbolic of the inner light, there is another practice in churches and temples of ringing the bell or bells and giving of "Azaan" by "Mouzan" which has a much deeper inner significance than is realized and surprisingly enough is taken to be just a call to the faithful for prayer. Herein lies the great hiatus between learning and wisdom, which are at poles asunder, for this too is symbolic of the music of soul, the audible life stream, the music of the spheres, the actual life principle pulsating in all the creation.

Without taking any more of your time, I would like to emphasize one thing: That all religions are profoundly good, truly worthy of our love and respect.

The object of this Conference is not to found any new religion as we have already enough of them, nor to evaluate the extant religions we have with us. Again, we should shed the idea of drawing up One World Religion for all religions, like so many states, are, in spite of their variegated forms and colours, but flowers in the garden of God and smell sweet. The most pressing need of the time, there, is to study our religious scriptures thoughtfully and to reclaim our lost heritage. A Saint says: "Everyone has in him a pearl of priceless value but as he does not know how to unearth it, he is going about with a beggar's bowl."

It is a practical subject and even to call it a religion of soul is a misnomer, for soul has no religion whatsoever. We may, if you like, call it the science of soul, for it is truly a science, more scientific than all the known sciences of the world, capable of yielding valuable and verifiable results, quite precise and definite.

By contacting the light and life principles, the primordial manifestations of God within the laboratory of the man body – which all the scriptures declare to be a veritable temple of God – we can virtually draw upon the bread and water of life, rise into Cosmic Awareness and gain immortality. This is the be-all and end-all of all religions.

Embedded as we all are in the one divinity, we ought to represent the noble truth of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is the living word of the living God and has a great potential in it. It has been rightly said: "Man does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God."

And this word of God is an unwritten law and an unspoken language. He who, by the power of the word, finds himself, can never again lose anything in the world. He who once grasps the human in himself understands all mankind.

It is that knowledge by knowing which everything else becomes known. This is an immutable law of the unchangeable permanence and is not designed by any human head. It is the Sruti of the Vedas, the Naad or Udgit of the Upanishads, the Sarosha of the Zend Avesta, the holy spirit of the Gospels, the lost word of the Masons, the Kalma of the Prophet Mohammed, the Saut of the Sufis, the shabd or naam of the Sikh scriptures, the music of the spheres and of all harmonies of Plato and Pythagoras, and the voice of the silence of the Theosophists.

It can be contacted, grasped and communed with by every sincere seeker after truth, for the good not only of himself but of the entire humanity, for it acts as a sure safety valve against all dangers with which mankind is threatened in this atomic age.

The only prerequisite for acquiring this spiritual treasure in one's own soul is self-knowledge. This is why sages and seers in all times and in all climes have in unmistakable terms laid emphasis on self-analysis. Their clarion call to humanity has always been: "Man, know thyself."

The Aryan thinkers in the hoary past called it "Atman Gyan" or knowledge of the Atman or soul. The ancient Greeks and Romans in turn gave to it the name of "gnothi seauton" and "nosce te ipsum" respectively. The Muslim divines called it "Khud-Shanasi", and Guru Nanak, Kabir and others stressed the need for "Apo Cheena" or self-analysis, and declared that so long as a man did not separate his soul from body and mind, he lived only a superficial life of delusion on the physical plane of existence. True knowledge is undoubtedly an action of the soul and is perfect without the senses. This then is the acme of all investigations carried out by man since the first flicker of self-awakening dawned in him.

This is the one truth I learned in my life, both in theory and practice, from my Master, Baba Sawan Singh Ji Maharaj, and have today placed it before you, as I have already been doing before the peoples in the West and East during my extensive tours all over, and have on experience found it of ready acceptance everywhere as a current coin, for it is the sole panacea for all the ills of the world, as well as ills of the flesh to which man is a natural heir through the working of the inexorable law of action and reaction: Ye shall reap as ye shall sow.

All of our religions are after all an expression of the inner urge felt by man from time to time to find a way out of the discord without into the halcyon calm of the soul within. "The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not." But we are so constituted by nature that we feel restless until we find a rest in the causeless cause.

If we live up to our scriptures and realize the light and life of God within us, then surely, as day follows the night, love would reign supreme in the universe and we will see nothing but the unseen hand of God working everywhere.

We must sit together as members of the one great family of man so that we may understand each other. We are, above everything else, one from the level of God as our father, from the

level of man as His children, and from the level of worshippers of the same truth or power of God called by so many names.

In this august assembly of the spiritually awakened, we can learn the great truth of oneness of life vibrating in the universe. If we do this, then surely this world with so many forms and colours will appear a veritable handiwork of God and we shall verily perceive the same life-impulse enlivening all of us. As His own dear children embedded in Him, like so many roses in His rose bed, let us join together in sweet remembrance of God and pray to Him for the well-being of the world in this hour of imminent danger of annihilation that stares us in the face. May God, in His infinite mercy, save us all, whether we deserve it or not.