

SOME GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

by

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On Religious Values

Is religion necessary? It may appear that it is not necessary, because it is concerned with ideals, may be even imaginary ones, and not with the realities of hunger, thirst and insecurity which are the obvious values of the visible world. But, religion is not an 'ideal', much less an imaginary one; for it is a name given to the consciousness of the totality and unifiedness of all values, whether they are external like the political, social and economic, or internal like health, love, cooperative feeling, knowledge and a sense of the universal element in all human aspiration. In this light, no one can be irreligious.

The philosophy underlying the unity of religions is obviously a system of comprehensive thinking, which would go deep into the very origin of the religious consciousness as it has manifested itself in the course of human history. It will, thus, transcend the limitations set by the formal religions of the world, which go by the name of the well-known 'isms'. Behind the forms of the manifest religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, and the like, there is a universally structured and applicable principle which gives rise to the awareness of the presence of some controlling and determining force, ranging

beyond the phenomena of earthly history. Essentially, the religious consciousness is an urge which directs human understanding to an all-encompassing Universal Power which is regarded not only as the source of the world of Nature and of all living beings, but also the regulator of the entire course of all evolution and all history.

The fundamental differences among religions are mainly rooted in (a) their concept of Ultimate Reality, (b) their theory of Cosmology, or creation of the world, (c) their notion of the relation of man with the Creator, (d) the traditional forms in which man's relation to the Creator are applied to mutual relationship in human society, which, incidentally, decides their concept of right and wrong in human relations, (e) their relation and attitude to the other faiths and religions than their own, and (f) the extent of sanctity or sacredness which they attach to human life, and to living beings in general. There are also other minor reasons behind religious differences.

Regarding a Code of Conduct for religious teachers, one would bear in mind, before framing such a code, that the Teacher is one (a) who lives what he teaches, without which quality the teachings will not carry conviction, and (b) who, while he may be born into the framework of any particular religion, has the intellectual vigour and the spiritual impersonality adequate enough to enable him to stand above the parochial characteristic of formal religion.

The rituals and the traditional functions and ceremonies associated with particular religions may be all equally permissible, furnishing the follower of one religion with the understanding necessary to appreciate the relative value and basic commonness behind such observances by the followers of other religions also, so that there would be mutual participation and collaboration among the adherents to apparently different religions.

A suggested routine for religious training may include (a) an inaugural commencing prayer, (b) a few minutes of silence and meditation, (c) select chants, prayers or hymns to

be recited from respective scriptures, (d) study of instructive and relevant passages from standard texts pertaining to the various religions, (e) a discourse, if possible, by someone competent, high-lighting the fundamental unity of all life, the uniformity behind the concepts of the aim of life, (f) the imperative performance of duty unselfishly in the station in which one is placed, with reference to not only one's own good, but also the larger good of the nation and of humankind as a whole. There is duty to one's own self as a physical, psychological and spiritual embodiment, duty to the family, the community, the nation, and the world at large.

On God and Spiritual Practice

Though God has no shape and no form, the human mind conceives of God only in some shape and form. The efficacy of meditation does not depend upon the question of form or formlessness of God, but on the manner of the inward visualisation of the Presence of God. The specific characteristic of God is Totality, Inclusiveness, and Non-externality. There can be nothing outside God, inasmuch as God is Infinite. Now, the concept of God in the process of meditation should be so framed that the visualisation includes every conceivable thing in the world, inasmuch as nothing outside God should be posited to exist. The distractions of the mind are caused, not by the visualisation of the form so much, as the feeling that something external or outside the visualised idea exists. In fact, for all practical purposes, formlessness should be understood to mean non-exclusiveness and absence of a second to the object of meditation, because there cannot be a concept of form unless there is something to distinguish it from another form. The point is that God has nothing outside Him to be so distinguished.

The process of 'gathering oneself together' means the bringing about of a total alignment of the inner layers of one's personality - understanding, willing and feeling blended into an integration of being. In the state of self-

control or bringing oneself together to a central focus of attention, one feels as one understands, and wills as one feels, so that these three psychological operations do not stand separated from one another, but act singly as a central operation of the whole of one's being. Or, to put it in more plain language, one maintains a harmony in thought, speech and action, without a dichotomy between one's inner being and outer behaviour. As a matter of fact, a feeling of oneself as present before the All-seeing Infinite, or seated in the presence of the Almighty, would spontaneously put a stop to all sensory or empiric activity, and bring about this togetherness of oneself at a single stroke.

To foster a continuous awareness of the Presence of God, it would be necessary for one to accept that God is the Ultimate Reality, and is the only Reality. If this is accepted and driven into one's conviction, there should be no difficulty in maintaining this consciousness. The difficulty with most people is a lack of faith in the sole existence of God, and a subtle feeling that something also is there outside God, such as the world of activity, of human relations, and the like. Study of elevating passages from the Scripture, regularly, everyday, would also assist in the maintenance of this consciousness. But, above all, the best way is to be in the company of great souls, with which blessing nothing can be compared.

Whatever has been stated above would also throw some light on the meaning of 'God-realisation'. It is the union of the soul of the individual with the Universal Soul, which is what one means by God or the Supreme Being. These are the final secrets which one receives from a Master, after effecting in oneself adequate purification of mind, both ethically and intellectually. God-realisation is attainment of Universal Perfection. It is to remain as Infinity and Eternity blended into One Being.

Different religions are like different medicines for different diseases of people. Every religion has some point of Truth in it. But there cannot be a universally prescribed

religious attitude for the whole of mankind, indiscriminately, in the same way as a common medicine cannot be prescribed for every kind of illness of everyone. The variety in the prescription of medicines does not mean that the medical science itself is diverse in its inner constituents. The science of medicine is an indivisible, single system of treatment of human nature, though it manifests itself as a variety of medical prescriptions, due to the difference in the kinds of illness of people. As the science is one and the medicines can be many, the background of religion is single, and in this sense we may say that there is only one religion, the religion of man in respect of the One God. Yet, we may say that there are many religions, as there are many medical prescriptions, all equally necessary and true in their own way, notwithstanding their internal difference.

On Educational Work

The point that nations are built in the classrooms, is not only the fundamental fact of human development and progress, but also the psychological background of any reconstructive programme in human nature. The pre-supposition of adventures in human life is not limited to the social or the political atmosphere, to which generally an excessive importance is attached, obviously on account of the physical and empirical needs of human individuality. The diverting of human attention to the various empirical forms of life is to be traced to a deeper than the visible cause of such a form of enterprise. Human knowledge being limited to what is available to the senses and to the understanding of the intellect, the necessary instrument of right knowledge, which is basic and really competent in contacting, the realities of life, is lost sight of. This predicament is due to the impetuosity of the longings of the senses, and of the intellect which mostly acts as a medium to justify the reports given by the senses and the ego.

The conditions of life as prevalent today are the natural outcome of employing a defective means of knowledge of the

world and of people in general. The evils of life are more properly the results of ignorance, rather than an intrinsic cussedness which man deliberately adopts in his personal and public life. All this is tantamount to saying that any project towards the achievement of the goal of human fraternity and well-being should root itself in a re-oriented form of right education, and there is no other way than the implementation of the educational process which is the primary requisite of mankind in general, though it appears superficially that human needs are other than the educational or even the psychological. The inveterate habit to which one is accustomed, not merely by the way in which one is brought up from childhood, but by the impact of many other antecedent causes, forces human consciousness to preclude any association of practical life with this central means of intuitive knowledge, by which alone the truths of life can be comprehended.

The main difficulty which an honest and interested educationist may face is, apart from the question of necessary finance, the finding of competent teachers or instructors who are well-informed in India's cultural lore and are personally inspiring examples of a truly dedicated and unselfish love and search for knowledge, and love wisdom for wisdom's sake. I do not say that such people are totally absent in India today, but they are rare to find, since many of them may belong to the older generation, whose age may not fit into the fairly arduous task of teaching in a school or academy. Our modern productions from colleges and universities, at least the majority of them, are likely to lack this essential quality required for instilling into the minds of the modern South the values of life as held aloft by the spirit of India's culture. There is also the question of place and accommodation for housing teachers and students for the purpose of instruction and residence. There is then, of course, the necessity to have the requisite financial backing for this ambitious project. The suggestions are not difficult to implement if the requisite facilities come forth. I am sure we

shall have occasion to discuss these essentials further, in due course.

On Social Welfare

The tensions caused by parochial feelings, anxieties and insecurities leading to tragic results in the outer and the inner lives of people are the unfortunate aftermath of the total absence of a common denomination or cementing background that has to be there in order to unite into an integrated framework human society, whether it is a family, a community, the nation, or mankind as a whole. This cohesive cement is the common purpose and ideal that has to rule over the welfare and destiny of families, communities, nations, and people in general. Else, individuals would fly at the throats of each other and feel like shreds and dismembered parts, with no sensible relation among themselves. Educationists, cultural leaders and spiritual geniuses kept this goal before themselves in all their motions and enterprises, and the same noble purposiveness has to reign supreme in human life even now, and at all times, if there is to be any such thing as peace on earth.

Anything that is in any way contributory to the satisfaction of the personality of man may be said to be related to welfare. Here, again, a great question arises, as to the nature of what is known as satisfaction. That alone can satisfy which is set in harmony with the human being. It is up to everyone to consider if there is anything in the world, or anywhere, which is somehow not connected with the human being. It would be good to take a homely illustration of the concept of welfare itself. A purely selfish individual, centred round one's own body and its impulses, may regard bodily pleasures as true welfare. But the error in this notion can easily be detected. Even one's existence is ostensibly connected with external factors, like the family, the community and the national setup, to mention the least. How can one expect one's own welfare to get materialised in experience, if these essential factors which tell upon one's

real welfare are not to be taken into account? Yet, even this is not enough. For, there is a larger world of mankind, an international sea of human power, which, too, has its impact on national organisations and isolated countries. It looks, thus, that nothing short of world-welfare can assure one's own individual welfare and satisfaction.

There is a more startling aspect of this issue, still. The larger universe contains this whole earth as almost a speck in space. Our little world may look like a drop in the ocean of a wider existence of unintelligent forces. From the point of view of this larger vision and a more broad-based outlook, it should be clear that no one can be happy, or truly be satisfied, until one is set in tune with creation itself. Is this possible? In fact, this question should not arise, because if this were not possible, existence itself would have no meaning or a worth-the-while significance. It should be possible, and it has to be.