

RELIGION AND DIVINE ASPIRATION

by

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The essence of religion is adoration of God. The permanency of a religion is based on its substantial foundation, which is dependent on the extent of the universality of its outlook. The more universal we are, the more permanent also we are. Religion, to be permanent, to be Sanatana, should cater to the needs of all people, and to the extent it excludes others from its fold, it is subject to destruction. Sanatana-Dharma is eternal religion. It does belong to the creation as a whole. It shows that it is capable of adjusting itself to the vicissitudes of time.

An idea or concept cannot be eternal unless it is capable of endurance. But everything here is perishable. The body perishes. The world is subject to change and destruction. The world is Anitya (impermanent) and Asukha (joyless). How, then, can we have something which is eternal in this transient world? Man is not eternal. Even the greatest saviours have gone. Even the Avatars like Rama and Krishna have cast off their physical bodies. Yet, there is something enduring in the midst of all unenduring things, "the eternal among those which are not permanent", as says the Upanishad. When everything is unenduring, we speak of an eternal Dharma, Sanatana-Dharma, notwithstanding the fact

that none of us has seen it. The culture of Bharatavarsha is identified with eternal religion.

Sanatana-Dharmaiscapable of adapting itself to changing time. Some opine that the caste system is one of the causes for its endurance. Others think otherwise. Some others hold that it is capable of absorbing everything into itself, and so it is eternal. But, where lies the centre of this religion? What is the substance of religion, which is the cause of its Sanatanata(eternality)? As mentioned, it is the adoration of God that is the quintessence of religion.

Now, the concept of God differs in different religions, and, accordingly, the idea of the relation between man and God, also differs. A perpetual relation would be the relation of the essential nature of the human being, and not the outer relation of the body, merely. That which is eternal in us establishes a relation with that which is eternal in the cosmos, so that the relationship, too, is eternal. There cannot be a meaningful relation between the eternal and the non-eternal. So, this eternal relation is the summoning of the inner in the outer. It is the cry of the soul for God. As God is eternal, religion must be eternal, for it is the relation between man and God, between Nara and Narayana, between Arjuna and Krishna.

How can we establish any relation with God? We have not seen God. He is unknown, unthinkable. The relation would fade away if one of its ends is not clear to the mind of man. This is one of the reasons why religions shake at the bottom. Here, a clear understanding is necessary. It is one of the qualifications of an aspirant. He must have an unshakable conviction, and a fixed conception of God. It must be a 'perception', a clear 'vision'. Our seers have emphasised that a person who is to be initiated into the Sanatana-Dharma should pass through the Gurukula. This system of training is not like the present-day education. After coming out of the college, the youth, generally, do not know what to do. The student has not been taught to 'live'. He is filled with all unwanted information, not useful for a living. But in the

Gurukula the inner man is trained, and faith is given the greatest importance. The human intellect cannot function except in terms of duality, such as, "I and you are different", "The world is outside me", and "I have a function to perform in the world, which is outside me", etc. Religion is not rooted in the reason of man, entirely, but in faith based on understanding. It is a symbol of inner culture. This inner training, imparted in ancient times, was of a permanent nature, and was to help the student throughout his life. Today, we see so much gap between education and life. There is nothing which touches the soul of man. This Gurukula training, during the Brahmacharyashrama, was a process of initiation of the soul to true living in the consciousness of a higher life. The students were told that we always live for something higher, as the present life is not complete in itself. Life is taught as a process for higher living, a journey to reach a distant destination. Religion, therefore, takes that higher value of life into consideration. At every step in the journey an inner connection is established between the soul and God. *Religion is what we do when we are alone*, and not the way we worship in public temples. It is the unfoldment of consciousness towards a larger dimension.

Sanatana-Dharmahas the capacity to include every faith and every philosophy in itself, because of its universality of approach. It sees God everywhere. To make this concept easy of understanding, the idea of Avatara, or incarnation, is introduced as a tenet peculiar to religion. Avatara means 'getting down'. It is the descent of God into the world. How can God descend when He is universal? Then, what is Avatara? This descent divine is not like a person getting down the steps. It is a grander and more profound principle. Avatars, as generally understood, are possible only when there is a collective cry of humanity for redeeming it from some serious calamity. Such Avatars, as the Ten Avatars of Narayana, then come. We have also lesser Avatars, like Vyasa, Dattatreya, etc., called 'Amsavatars'. It is one of the fundamentals of religious belief that God is in the world, immanent. He sees us, hears us. Hence, religion becomes a

matter of the heart, of love, adoration and feeling. God is all-pervading, omnipresent, just here, not apart from us, even by a few inches. This idea is the soul or essence of religion. Mere speculation is not religion. Philosophy put into practice is religion. Religion is, thus, divine living, Divine Life. It is not your or my religion. It is the religion of humanity. It is the relation between Man and God—not the Hindu and God, not the Christian and God—but Man and God. Religion, essentially, cannot be manifold. It has, perforce, to be one sweep of human nature in the direction of Absolute-Universality. Any genuine step taken towards this end is also true religion.

Yet, a universal religion is not possible, because each one's way is different; the approach is different, due to the difference in temperaments and capacities. Thus, what we can really achieve is tolerance towards other faiths, instead of a homogeneity of belief. Universal religion should, therefore, mean the following of one's own religion, with tolerance to all other religions. It is impossible to think of God as *He is*. To think of God as *He is*, we have first, to cease to be. So, the idea of Avatara is bequeathed, representing God as what He is to man, as He is manifest, relatively. Avatara is the connecting link between the ordinary human nature and the divine reality. Avatara is a manifestation of God through Mula-Prakriti. That is why we have to recognise an Avatara, though God is everywhere and can be worshipped in that highest capacity, if possible.

Whether an Avatara is a descent of God to man or man's ascent to God, is immaterial for us. Literally, Avatara means descent or manifestation. When the need for the higher values of life is felt more, the Avatara becomes a helpful stepping stone. The farther we are from God, the greater is the need we feel for the higher life. When humanity drifts too much from truth, the Avatara becomes necessary. To some extent, God tolerates our mistakes. When we go too far, He comes down with a rod to correct us. Just as a mother allows a child to play, and go here and there, but when the child is about to fall into a pit she runs to its help, God manifests

Himself when it is necessary to correct mankind's perspective of life.

God incarnates himself in the world, whenever there is decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, for the purpose of the protection of the good, the vanquishing of the wicked and establishment of justice, in every age.

The theory of divine incarnation has been a controversial issue in the philosophy of religion and has been one of the intriguing questions in theology. It is impossible metaphysically to interpret to the mind of man the divine secret of the movement of spiritual force in the world. When a solution is attempted, the Avatara reveals itself as the answer of God to the needs of man. There is an internal bond of inseparable relation between the relative and the Absolute, and the descent of God on earth is the pressure or power of truth forcing itself into the realm of the relative when the harmony of this bond and relation gets dissipated by centrifugal psychic energies that seem to run counter to the integrating centripetal call of God to all manifestation. The descent of God as the Avatara is said to be for the ascent of man to his divine home. As the health-giving forces of harmony in the body perpetually wage a war with the disease-producing toxins, the universal balancing power of the Absolute introduces itself as a corrective element amidst the disturbing forces of darkness. The Avatara is a perpetual activity of God who manifests Himself at every juncture or critical situation (*Yuge, Yuge*) in the life of the world. The Avatara is the recurring reminder of God to man that it is impossible for the undivine to triumph over the essential goodness and divinity immanent in creation.