

SPIRITUAL IDEALS AND HUMANITARIAN VALUES

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

The question of trying to find or establish a relation between spirituality and society is something like trying to build a bridge to connect God and man on the assumption, a presupposition that there is a dichotomy, a gulf already existing between spirituality and society, between the supreme creative principle and the manifested universe. But a question in our minds arises: How comes this issue at all into the prominence of the great controversy through the history of philosophy and religious disquisitions? Why should there have arisen a necessity to find a relationship between God and man, between the pursuit of the spirit and the implementation of social values in one's own personal life? This question arises on account of a peculiar defective arrangement of the constitutive elements which go to make up the human personality itself. The gulf does not exist between God and man or spirituality and society, but there is a gulf between what man is and what he appears to be.

The social man and the true man seem to be standing apart. There appears to be a schism within the structure of the human psyche itself—man seems to be a double personality. It is within man that we have to establish a relationship. The alignment we are required to establish is

more within the structure and pattern of the human individual rather than with God and human society.

The perception of a difference between the Creator and the created universe is the reason behind the recognition of a distance between human values, call them social values, and spiritually oriented values and aspirations. It is in the habit of human thinking to find a peculiar irreconcilability between the present condition of social existence and the nature of a future fulfillment of human aspiration—the end result of all evolution, we may say, the very purpose of all existence and human endeavor.

We live in a world which is constituted in a particular manner. We live in a society which is of a specific character, and we ourselves are people of one particular kind. None of us is satisfied with himself or herself. No one says that present day human society is a desirable type of society. There is dissatisfaction with every kind of solution that has been found for bringing about a transvaluation of values and we have to think of a remedy for the ills of life. The ills are visible to our eyes, but the remedy is not so very clear before our eyes. Here we have automatically established a psychological distance between the present state of affairs, individually, socially, and universally, and the aspired goal which seems to be in our minds.

Why should any one of us be dissatisfied with this world, with our own selves, and the present day human society? Dissatisfaction is certainly, obviously, logically an indication of there being a state of affairs which is totally other than the prevailing conditions in the world. This unwittingly accepted proposition that the world can be other than what it is now and human society ought to be different from what it is at present indicates the transcendence, a kind of otherworldly character introduced into the goal of our aspirations.

It was discussed in the morning whether the ideal of Indian society, human society, religion and spirituality, is in any way otherworldly. Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj said during his few words of conclusion that the goal is certainly

otherworldly, but it is also not otherworldly for another reason altogether. His ideas are a little complicated, which require careful analysis and consideration. A study, an investigation into issues of this kind is like the solution of a mathematical proposition or the deduction of logical categories, not to be taken lightly as a type of after dinner novel which you may read this way or that way.

The otherworldly character of human aspiration or the goal of human aspiration becomes obvious from the fact that nothing in this world can satisfy us. If the goal of our aspiration is only in this world and not out of the world, if the kingdom of heaven is here and not elsewhere, there would be no sorrow, no pain, no suffering and no conception of evil throughout the process of human history.

It has been said that life is a veil of tears. We weep either covertly or overtly, within ourselves or in the public; but we always weep in the sense that our soul is in a state of distress. We stifle the consciousness of this distress of the soul many-a-time by drinking the liquor of sensory satisfactions, and causing titillations to the nerves by various gadgets of a material nature or a psychological nature, all which attempt on the part of the human being has, instead of bringing about a solution to the existing problems, seems to have made matters worse.

Today people are apprehensive of a possible descending of the world into lower and lower realms of involvement, rather than an expected evolution of it to a higher and higher aspiration and fulfillment, culturally or even intellectually.

The finitude that characterizes everything in this world, the fact of death that cannot free anyone from its clutches, the final eluding character of every kind of happiness in this world, the transitory nature of everything, the very evolutionary character of the universe itself, establishes what we may call the otherworldly character of the goal that our soul aspires for. It is otherworldly in a very, very specific, scientific, logical sense, and from these little words that I spoke just now, you would have been able to gather in what

sense it is otherworldly. Why should Christ have taken so much trouble of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of heaven, to come by self-discipline, austerity, self-control and service, if the kingdom of heaven is on this earth itself? All is well with this world, and there is no need to say anything further about it.

But the saints and sages and incarnations, and even human conscience in its varied manifestations, have been pointing out that the kingdom of perfection is not in this world, if by the term 'world' we are to understand the physical, material composition of an exterior presentation in the form of elements like earth, water, fire, air and ether, this astronomical universe and this human entity and this society constituted of these human entities.

Our aspiration, our longing, our desire, our hunger and our thirst is gross. Many a time we realize it in our own leisurely hours, and everyone has to realize it one day or the other, at least toward the end of one's life. If nothing in the world is going to satisfy us finally, the goal of life is not in this world. In this sense the great spiritual ideal is otherworldly.

But it is not otherworldly in another sense altogether. If the perfection that we seek, the goals that we aspire for, the God who created this universe is outside this world in the sense of a totally otherworldly, disconnected existence, there would be no ladder to connect the world with the perfection aspired for or the God who might have created this world.

The attainment of God, the achievement of perfection, the goal of life would be a chimera, a sheer abstraction with no substantial or solid content, if it is impossible to attain it merely because of the fact of the otherworldliness of its character, there being no connection between the world and the otherworldly nature of its existence. But the possibility of the fulfillment of this ideal which is vouch shaped by the very fact of the arising of a desire for such a perfection, points out another aspect of this issue, namely, that the otherworldly character of the final goal of human aspiration is also

somehow or other vitally connected with this earth, earthy, worldly life.

This physical tabernacle of the human personality, this gross, dirty earth, this material world, this lowest level of the descent of reality in the process of evolution, is in the worst of its involvements, yet, nevertheless, connected with the highest of possibilities, the Supreme Absolute itself. The cause, which is the original creative principle, say our scriptures, has gradually come down by a gradational descent of condensation of involvement into the lowest of categories we call matter.

The Upanishadic categorization of these stages of involvement go by the names of Anna, Prana, Manas, Vijana, and Ananda, corresponding to the well-known sheaths of the human personality, the Koshas, as they are called — Annamaya, Pranomaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, Anandamaya. That means to say, the levels of physicality, mentality, intellectuality, and causality—these are the sheaths of human individuality, or, for the matter of that, any kind of individuality whatsoever.

That we are involved in the human body, in this physical vestment, is a well known fact. That we live in a physical world which is utterly material also is something well known to us. We are materially involved—personally, individually, as well as socially. All our acquisitions, all our needs in this world, have finally been clinched by the word 'material'. There is nothing non-material anywhere in this world. Neither we, as physical bodies, have anything non-material, nor can the world, which is material, be anything other than what it is. We seem to be groping in a darkness of physical involvement; yet this lowest of involvements, which is entirely material, physical, dark, earthy, is also the footstool of the supremely transcendent Absolute.

In the description of the Viratsvarupa, as we have recorded in the Purusha Sukta of the Veda and also in the Epics like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Puranas like the Vishnu Purana, the Srimad Bhagavata, etc., we are told

earth is the footstool; the material level constitutes the feet of development. The lowest manifestation is the lowest part of a humanely concealed picturization of the organizing principle. All things are included within the vast evolutionary process we call creation, arising from an unending principle, spatially as well as temporally, and finding its completion in the physical earth.

People like us, who live in the physical world, have to realize God. It is absolutely essential to achieve this perfection, and at least some of us who are here in this holy atmosphere would have been fully convinced of this necessity to work for God-realization, or Self-realization as it is sometimes called. But this longing of ours would be a futile attempt if there had been no connecting link or a possible relationship between our present involvement—which is of the worst possible involvements—if there is no link between this state of affairs with the highest potentialities and possibilities divinely conceived.

The relationship between spiritual ideals and social values would have been made a little clear by this little bit of analysis of the circumstances prevailing in this world as a last evolute in the process of evolution, the final aim that has come out from the supreme creative principle, yet having its connection with the ultimate cause.

The Ultimate Cause, according to the Vedanta, according to the Sankhya, is the supreme Purusha—the Universal Intelligence, Brahman, as the Vedanta or the Upanishad calls it. The terminology of these lofty doctrines has its own ways of describing the gradual manifestation of things. The Sankhya would tell us that the potential for the manifestation of the world, the pressure-point for the externalization of the Universal, is the Prakriti. Mula Prakriti is constituted of a threefold involvement—Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas—through which the supreme Purusha gets reflected, as it were, as the Sankhya would put it, in the manner of a reflection of an object brought before or to the proximity of a pure crystal.

The condensation of potentiality, the coming into a formation of greater and greater density of universality, takes place gradually, to put it in the language of the Vedanta philosophy—Brahman becomes Ishvara, Ishvara becomes Hiranyagarbha, Hiranyagarbha becomes Virat. In the language of the Sankhya, Prakriti becomes Mahat, Mahat becomes Ahankar—all which finally mean one and the same thing from two different angles of definition. These terms, Prakriti, Mahat, Ahankar or Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat actually mean a universal process of condensation of the ultimate universality which is Brahman or Purusha.

After the manifestation of the physical universality called Virat, there is a further creative action taking place through which we have a tripartite division of the contents of creation—Adhyatma or the individual, Adhibhuta or the objective universe. The objectivity of the universe arises only after the tripartite division takes place, consequent upon the manifestation of Virat, in which condition there is no such division. The Adhibhuta is the physical, objective universe, the Adhyatma is the subjective percipient—you, I and everyone that cognizes, perceives things, and a connecting link between the subjective and the objective sides—Adhidaiva, a superintending divinity. They are all highly technical things, but the mention of these principles becomes necessary to bring about some sort of understanding of what relationship exists between the spiritual and the material, the transcendent and the immanent—or rather, the principle of God and human society.

The individual man is, according to the doctrine of evolution, a kind of latecomer. Prior to him there were earlier creations. This doctrine is not merely a finding of Western culture, not of Darwin or Lamarck, but it is mentioned also in the Puranas and the Srimad Bhagavata, and as I mentioned today in the morning, we have a mention of it also in the Aitareya Aranyaka. That means to say, from the grossest of elements into which the Virat descended in the form of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether—arose the life principle. Vegetation in the beginning,

and animals afterwards, and finally human beings. These human beings, which is human nature, constitute human society. Social values are human values, individual values, personal values, my value, your value—all are included in what you call social values. A society is nothing but an agreed arrangement of psychic operations among human individuals for the purpose of personal security and personal advancement in any manner whatsoever.

So, the evolution of the human individual, or rather the descent, we may say, of the human individual in the process of the creation as described in the manner mentioned in the terminology of the Vedanta philosophy would point out, would highlight the fact that there is a living connection between man and God; that means to say, a vital connection between human society and the Supreme Divine Principle. If this is the truth, any one of you will be able to immediately discover the fact of an eternal coordination subsisting, operating, permeating between the highest and the lowest.

In this context of our discussion, under the auspices of this Centenary, we are discussing a relationship between spiritual aspiration and social life, the connection between spiritual ideals and social values. The theme is intensely philosophical, highly analytical, requiring a sharp intellectual potentiality and leisure of mind to come to conclusions of this kind, which can be preferably and perhaps possibly achieved only through personal meditation. Intellectual discussions, scriptural studies and orations will not finally satisfy the surging longing of the human soul. The perfection that we seek is within our own selves. It is God speaking within the deepest possibility of the human being, the Atman, which is nothing but the Paramatman localized in human circumstance. A universal Paramatman engaged, as it were, within the locality of the human body is Atman. That is the obvious relationship between God and man, between the Creator and the universe, between spirituality and society, between the lowest and the highest, between the here and the hereafter.

This astounding conclusion was arrived at by the masterminds of the Vedas and the Upanishads in this country, a final word which is the only answer to the eternal query that torments human minds—what is life, what is its purpose, where it is moving, to what it is tending, what is it aspiring for, in what it can find its fulfillment. With these few words which attempted to bring about a little bit of coordination among the ocean-like contributions of the scholars who participated in this 3 day seminar, I request Sri Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj to give his concluding blessings with which he will perform the Purnavati of this great Yajna of a three day seminar on spiritual ideals and humanitarian values.