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Teaching of the Masters

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Teaching of the Masters (Part 1)

Throughout the ages people have felt the need to believe in a Supreme Being or Power or God. They feel that life and all of nature are a mystery and cannot be understood by our rationality. Science has given us many answers about the physical aspects of the world, and is probing into the universe. But science has not answered the basic human urge to know or understand who we truly are, if we remove our labels of name, race, caste, culture, religion and professions. Once these are removed we do not have an identity, and cannot properly relate to others in a meaningful way. Yet we do exist. So who are we? It is to find answers to this and related questions that people have the need to turn to a Supreme Power that holds the secret of the universe with all of us in it.

Our senses are limited and our eyes can perceive only a small band of visible light in the huge electromagnetic spectrum. We cannot see beyond ultra-violet and infrared wavelengths, yet a large spectrum of wavelengths are on either side of visible light. The same limitation holds for the other sense organs. So how do we get knowledge of attributes such as the soul, the mind, God, Spirit, Self, Maya, Life Force, liberation, bondage, and similar questions relating to life and the cosmos? It is difficult or impossible for us to teach ourselves so that we can truly understand Reality in which everything else exists. But there is an inner unexpressed need to understand more of ourselves, and the world and the universe. Ultimately, we have a need to know God. To fill this need to know ourselves and have some inkling of what God is, spiritual masters have come in our midst over the ages to enlighten us.

We are made up of the body, mind, intellect and soul. The body is made up entirely of earthly material. From conception, the embryo takes up substances from the food and drink of the mother. The food and drink are of the earth. The embryo grows to the fetus, then to the newborn, all the time taking in earthly material. During the rest of life for growth and maintenance of the body, a person ingests things produced from the earth. At death the body returns to earth. Another being takes up the materials the same way, so there is a continuous recycling of earthly matter in all beings. So the body is not reality. The mind is both conscious and subconscious as is commonly known. The conscious mind functions from moment to moment and not continuously. The subconscious mind functions mostly as storage for memory, feelings, attitudes, hang-ups, and other personality traits. But the mind can be put to rest by a hypnotist, or in dreamless sleep, in coma or under surgical anesthesia. Can the mind then be said to have reality? The same can be said of the intellect which cannot function under these circumstances. Both the mind and intellect can go haywire by the ego, and passions of anger, greed, lust and so forth. What then is the basis for our dear life and all of its attributes – both positive and negative? Do we deserve to seek further knowledge, or are we content to drift along the river of life, facing stresses, depressions, anxieties, violence, frustrations and all the other problems we are familiar with? Is there any way

of understanding life so that we can enjoy love, peace, harmony, brotherhood, self-empowerment, and other positive attributes?

Answers to these pertinent questions are available if we truly seek. We need to find the basis or the “ground” on which existence depends, and how we can “adjust” our thinking and understanding to make our life sublime. We need to free the mind from accumulated static dogmas, doctrines and practices, and be open to the Universal Spirit that has no boundaries.

Teaching of the Masters (Part 2)

People intuitively believe in a Supreme Being whom they call by different names. The named Being is the same in spite of ‘labels’ applied to It or to Him or to Her. Anything that can be named must have a finite existence in time and space, and must be cognizable by the senses. It has to exist in a duality in which the one who thinks he cognizes the other, and this other – the Supreme – must be outside of him. This state of affairs nullifies the omnipresence of the Supreme. Has any one talking of the Supreme known It (Him, Her) by the use of the sense organs? How then can the Supreme Being be named and described in various ways? Sooner or later we have to ask ourselves these questions, and try to find adequate answers so that we can direct our spiritual energies in the proper direction to reach a certain goal towards which we feel we are heading. If we do not, then we would be tossed about by the vicissitudes of life, and not find a safe mooring, and our energies would have been spent and our days ended unfulfilled.

There are several topics we need to deal with as raised in the above paragraph. Let us consider omnipresence of the Supreme – God. Simply stated, God is everywhere. This “everywhere” does not mean the earth alone that is no more than an invisible speck in the Milky Way galaxy that consists of billions of stars, and our sun is only one of them – and its only a medium sized one. Outside of our Milky Way galaxy there are billions of other galaxies in an expanding and infinite universe. So where do we place God? Omnipresence means “everywhere at the same time”. What sort of a Being can have this attribute? This is a question we need to consider if we wish to follow a meaningful religious or spiritual life.

This omnipresent Being is also eternal as it is infinite. What is meant by “eternal”? Does It have a beginning or will It have an end? There is no beginning or end of the Supreme. The masters have explained that God is beyond time and space, and beyond name and forms. So what name and what form do we give to God? Does the name any religious system gives to God the proper name? And every religion has its chosen name or names for God. Can we name the un-namable? So it is clear that the names we give to God are for our convenience in communicating with one another of the same belief system, and no more. If we can name that which we cannot perceive with our senses, and which is un-namable, then God is no more God. So where are we to go from here?

Another question is the gender of God. In nearly all scriptures, writings and discussions God is referred to as “Him”. Who figured out that God is male? In calling God by a male designation, we are unconsciously urged to do so by identifying with the human male. So what about the human female? Does she not have an equal representation in the name of the Supreme? Can God be a male or a female and still be omnipresent and eternal? Male and female represent limitations. Can we limit the infinite and eternal? Are we perhaps confusing ourselves, and not

taking the trouble or initiative to un-confuse us? We need to ponder on this issue if we are to be on the proper path to reach the nebulous goal, which we feel we are going to reach.

If we think that God is neither he nor she, as we have been trying to understand, then perhaps we can say God is “It”. “It” would indicate a neuter gender, and would be more in keeping with a Force or Energy or Universal Intelligence or Consciousness. We are familiar with the terms “Cosmic Consciousness” “Cosmic Intelligence” “Cosmic Being” and so forth. Would this not better fit the definition of omnipresence, infinity and eternity, and not yet mentioned omnipotence, and free us from calling God a male or perhaps a female, and impose limitations on It? We have to come to grips with this question also if we are to see our way clear to reach our spiritual goal.

Now let us consider the concept of duality. Duality indicates that there is an observer and something outside of him that he observes. It is the “pair of opposites” we are familiar with such as “me and you”, “here and there”, “good and bad” and so forth. In all religions people speak of God as being elsewhere, and they direct their prayers to “Him” who is in heaven above, or in Swarga or Satlok. At the same time people also say God is everywhere. This is contradictory, and denies God’s omnipresence. How can we reconcile these contradictions so that we are clear in our minds that we are following the proper path to our spiritual goal? Yet, as spiritual beings, we must reconcile them, for there is a uni-versal “Unity” in which we exist. Only when we have a satisfactory answer to these can we have an intuitive knowledge of our integrative relationship with God whose omnipresence unites all of us.

Teaching of the Masters (Part 3)

In the previous articles we have discussed the concepts of omnipresence, infinity, duality the possible “gender” of God, and our place in this infinite universe. We would need to return to these from time to time in future discussions according to how the subjects unfold. We need to be aware from the very beginning that we are using words to try to understand and define concepts and attributes that transcend words of any language. Words are symbols to represent sounds that form words. Words as words have no inherent meanings. They symbolize things, ideas, concepts, feelings and other attributes. But our understanding of all of these depends on our exposure to them before, so that we have a memory of the “things” or concepts that the words symbolize. The word “apple” has no meaning until we associate it with the fruit. So according to the number of words and ideas a person has, we would roughly determine his level of education.

From the above we see that a person’s education may be tied to his exposure to symbols (words) over time. But there is another type of knowledge that does not depend on words. In fact words cannot describe it. Take for example “love”. We all “know” what love is, but can we make someone understand or feel love if we use words to explain it? Can we make someone experience the sweet taste of sugar by describing the taste to him? Thus, some types of knowledge are intuitive, and come from within, and must be experienced personally to become knowledge for that person. To explain this point Guru Kabir said that if you repeat “God” “God” “God”, and you would get to God, then repeating “sugar” “sugar” “sugar” would make your mouth sweet, and repeating “food” “food” “food” would fill your stomach.

The point being made here is that to delve into spirituality we need to use words in the scriptures as instructions, guides, encouragement, yearning for Self-realization, and for developing faith, devotion and dedication. Scriptures would help to the extent that we develop and purify ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually. Once we practice these disciplines and are “elevated” to a certain degree, then we begin to develop an inner or intuitive knowledge of our real Self as spirit that is divine. It is this inner knowledge that gives us enlightenment, and frees us from passions of ego, greed, lust, anger, attachments, envy, hate, violence and worldly, material bondage, and confers freedom on us. This is the goal that our spiritual masters have come in the world to teach us. Are we ready to accept and practice the teachings? Let us truthfully and honestly answer this question for ourselves, and develop and awareness of where we are, what we have to do, and where we have to reach.

The above explanation of the use of words is to lay the foundation for future discussions of the soul, God, spirit, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, eternity, infinity, creation, and similar topics that are likely to arise in pursuing the subject “Teaching of the Masters”.

In the universe there are two obvious forms of manifestation as matter and energy. Science tells us that matter cannot be created or destroyed, but can only be changed from one form to another. Also, energy cannot be created or destroyed, but can only be changed from one form to another. They both exist in eternity and infinity, though scientists estimate that the universe is about fifteen billions years old and that it is ever expanding. Matter and energy are co-existent and depend on each other for manifesting their nature. There cannot be any sunlight without the sun (matter) or magnetism without the iron. There can be no matter without energy as in the atoms. The atomic bomb illustrates this principle. There is a “strong force” that holds the subatomic particles in the nucleus of each atom. Thus, the whole universe manifests as different combinations and permutations of energy and matter.

Science tells us that the universe started as a “Big Bang” about fifteen billion years ago with such a tremendous force that it is still expanding. We would leave out the theory of “dark energy – dark matter” that is thought to keep the universe expanding. The thing that went “Bang” is called the “Singularity” of very dense matter so that it contained all the matter that is now in the infinite universe. But from where did this “Singularity” come into being, and what motivated it to explode. Science does not have an answer. But the universe is here. And as far as science can tell us, and masters instruct us, the universe is infinite and eternal. Every particle in the universe, from the subatomic to the huge galaxies, is in constant motion, undergoing changes over huge periods of time, yet maintaining an overall harmony. Is there perhaps some form of intelligence involved in the functioning of the universe? We are all involved, so we should try to have some understanding of our place in the universe. Only then can we understand the teaching of the Masters.

Teaching of the Masters (Part 4)

Previously, matter and energy were discussed briefly, and spirit was mentioned. Actually, spirit is the basis of all existences in the universe. Spirit has no form, location, dimension or any other measurable property, yet it is the greatest force in the universe. And since energy is involved in every ‘activity’ or motion in the universe, we can say that spirit is the basis for the manifestation

of all other forms of energy. In this part we will discuss spirit manifesting in us, and try to understand how it can be used to overcome tragedies affecting the world.

In order to understand the problems of the world, it is necessary to understand the human being. How does a person understand himself and his relationship to others? Is he merely a physical being that possesses a mind, emotions and intellect, or is he, perhaps, a spiritual being, possessing these attributes? Ordinarily, we see people as individuals with their individual personalities, likes and dislikes, motivations, aspirations, behavior and so forth, and accept them at that level. We do not see people at the deeper level, that they are spirit. Is it not valid to say that we are spirit that possesses the body, mind, emotions and intellect? If we look at people as spiritual beings, then we would realize that this spirit is of the same essence in all of them. We can say that the spirit of God dwells in all beings. This allows us to see our brotherhood in all. But in order to understand the spirit we need to examine our sense of 'being'.

In every person, there is a sense of being, a sense of awareness of the self. A person instinctively knows that he 'is' and that he 'exists'. This knowledge manifests in two ways: #1 – the physical, external and superficial awareness of the self as the body with a form, a name, a race, and a gender, and other external characteristics. #2 – the spiritual, internal and deep sense of awareness of the self that cannot be defined by any external characteristics. The first is common knowledge to all humans, and people will describe themselves with the external, physical characteristics. If someone is asked: "Who are you?" the person will most likely respond by giving his name, or his profession, or his relationship to a significant person. This is how he observes himself, and also how others observe him. He fits into a label that has been fostered by himself, his family, society and religion. For nearly all practical purposes, this definition of a person is adequate, and places him in a context, which he, himself, and others readily perceive and understand. However, this definition does not persist under all circumstances, as we shall see.

If the knowledge of the self were dependent on the physical being, then this knowledge should change with changes in the physical being. In childhood, there is a total awareness of being, and this same awareness persists throughout growth into adulthood, old age and even up to the time of death. The knowledge of being or existence remains constant, though the body has undergone significant changes. Another example: A person weighs 150 lbs. and has an awareness of his being. He now gains 150 lbs. and weighs 300 lbs. His awareness of being still remains the same. Now if he loses 100 lbs. his knowledge of being still remains the same. It did not double with doubling the weight, nor did it decrease by reducing the weight. We can see then that the self does not depend on the physical aspects of a person. There must then be another attribute by which to understand a person's being. This is where the second or spiritual attribute enters.

There is an underlying basis by which the self becomes aware of being. This basis is non-physical and spiritual in nature. This attribute is called the spirit, or the soul or the Divine Spark that gives life. It is on the basis of this that a person has his physical existence, and is described by external characteristics. In spiritual life, we need to understand the immanent, self-existent soul that is connected with Infinite Being i.e. God. It is this connection with God that is the same for all people, though agnostics and atheists may not agree. This realization confers brotherhood, harmony, love, peace and unity.

Now, returning to the problems of the world, if people can see the basic unity of the self as spirit that is the same in all beings, then people will see themselves ‘reflected’ in other beings. It is like looking into a mirror and seeing the reflection of your physical self. Spiritual knowledge will allow the spirit to be reflected from and in each living being.

Some people may argue that a spiritual life like this is not practical, and that the physical is the practical way. If we look throughout history, we would find that the purely physical has not brought about the desired state that we would like. We also know instinctively that if we live the spiritual life, then the world will certainly be a much better place. Dedicated spiritual people have achieved a great deal of peace, love and harmony, and they have shared these with other people. If all people would develop the same attributes as spiritual people, then we can indeed have a better world. All the current violent problems externally, and the problems internally, will definitely decrease or be abolished. We would then begin to understand the teaching of the masters.

Just as clay is transformed into various kinds of pottery, similarly One Consciousness manifests itself as so many finite intellects.

Mahayana Buddhism

Measure not with words the immeasurable.

Edwin Arnold English poet in The Light of Asia

Teaching of the Masters (Part 5)

The omnipotence of God has been mentioned previously but not discussed. Omnipotence in Hindi is sarv shaktiman. The word is derived from the Latin omni (all) and potentia (power, energy). In this essay we will look at what omnipotence is so that we can form some idea of this ‘all power’ and how it operates in the universe. I must admit here that I am not a physicist, so the discussion would be from a simpler angle and, hopefully, understandable by the average reader.

Energy was mentioned before. We would now discuss it in more detail. Scientists say that energy manifests in four ways – gravitation, electromagnetism, strong force and weak force. Gravitation is what gives us weight, and this is due to the fact that gravitational force attracts two or more bodies of matter towards one another. The earth’s gravity acts on all things so they all have weight. Each one of us also pulls on the earth due to this gravitational force, but we are so small that our pull on the earth is negligible. The force of attraction between any two bodies of matter is proportional to their mass and their distances apart. The farther apart two bodies are, the less is the gravitational pull. So the very heavy space vehicle on earth becomes weightless in space. That is how the space station remains in orbit. You may be familiar from watching television that astronauts float around in their shuttle in earth orbit due to weightlessness. Another example would be a person’s weight on the moon which has about one/sixth the mass of the earth. A person weighing 150 pounds on earth would weigh only 25 pounds on the moon. Just so all celestial bodies exert gravitational pull on one another, and they maintain a certain ‘balance’ by spinning in orbits. The orbital velocity balances the centripetal and centrifugal forces to keep them in orbits. This gravitational force operates in the whole universe.

The second force is electromagnetic force. This force acts on electrically charged particles and holds electrons and protons together in atoms, and holds atoms together in molecules. Unlike electric charges attract, and like charges repel each other. Similarly, unlike magnetic poles attract and like poles repel each other. Electricity and magnetism act on each other so that a wire moving in a magnetic field will develop electricity, and also if a magnet is moved towards or away from the wire. The electromagnetic force operates in the atoms so that the electrons spin around the nucleus of the atoms, and that the protons are held together in the nucleus of the atoms. Atoms combine to form molecules due to this force. Molecules of the same kind that are held together form an element such as gold, copper, oxygen etc. Molecules of different kinds combine to form compounds such as sugar, flour, cement, medicines etc. All the matter in the universe consists of atoms and molecules in different combinations.

The other two forces are the strong and the weak that are in the nuclei of atoms. The strong force holds the subatomic particles, mostly quarks, together, and the weak force causes radioactive decay of atoms. Quarks are particles that are held together by the strong force to form protons and neutrons in the nuclei of atoms. The power contained in the nuclei of atoms is revealed in the nuclear bombs that can each destroy a city as happened in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan by United States during the second world war.

Scientists theorize that all these four forces together arise from the unified force or unified field theory. This is not yet confirmed. Scientists also theorize that there is a ‘God particle’ that is fundamental to all manifestations. It is reasonable to say that all the energy or force in the universe must have a single source from which they manifest in different ways. We can call the ‘source’ God or the Absolute Being, or any other name, since God has nothing to do with what name we give to ‘Him’. Since all the energy in the universe is from God, we must admit that God is omnipotent. It is His omnipotence that keeps every particle, and every process and function, from the non-living to the living, working in harmony. We are part of the universe and take part in this universal harmony.

Teaching of the Masters (Part 6)

We have previously discussed the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. In this essay we need to explore what is meant by the omniscience of God. Since all of us are limited in our ability to know the Infinite and Absolute Being, we can nevertheless try to formulate some ideas of what omniscience can possibly mean. Let us say that we need to “stretch” our minds so that we develop a greater understanding of nature and how we fit into it.

Omniscience is derived from the Latin Omnis (all) and sciens (knowing). In Hindi or Sanskrit it is sarvagya. The question now is what or who is all-knowing, and what does all-knowing mean. The universe is infinite and as far as anyone can tell, it is eternal, so how can we form any ideas about omniscience that applies on the universal level. Fortunately we have intelligence that helps us to understand things if we apply it both objectively and subjectively to seek knowledge.

Knowledge is derived by certain means, and all people seeking knowledge use them consciously or unconsciously. The means are: 1. Observation. We observe things and events all around us, and we develop an awareness that certain things always happen under the same circumstances. For example, if you apply heat to water, it would become hot and then evaporate. This can be

repeated by anyone anywhere, and the same results would occur. This then becomes knowledge. 2. Experimentation. This involves keen observation, measurement and recording of then results. Others repeat the experiment, and if the same results are obtained, then this becomes knowledge. All scientists use this method and scientific knowledge increases over time. All the scientific advancements around us are derived by this method, and we are all benefiting, as our lives have been made better. 3. Analogy. This involves comparing things and events, and if they always bear the same relationships, then we develop knowledge. A simple example would be, whenever there is smoke there must be fire. 4. Intuition. This type of knowledge develops from within oneself. Expressions such as “I have a hunch”, “I just got a bright idea”, or “I woke up with this idea”. Spiritual knowledge is nearly entirely intuitive knowledge, as we realize this at a personal level. It is an inner experience, and cannot often be explained in a meaningful way to others. 5. Authoritative. This is knowledge derived from authoritative sources such as books, scriptures and experts in different field of knowledge. A great deal of our knowledge is derived from this last category. There is an overlap in all of these ways of obtaining knowledge, but no matter how each of us derives knowledge, our type and level of knowledge vary, so no two of us can have exactly the same knowledge at any time in our lives. In the acquisition of knowledge by any means we have to use our rational ability, and mentally categorize them in memory for use as is needed.

Now coming back to omniscience, who has the capacity to have all the knowledge in the universe? Certainly, it could not be a person for people have finite abilities, and cannot grasp infinite knowledge. So again we must return to God as the only Being that has this ability. Just as we have ascribed omnipotence and omnipresence to God, just so we must ascribe omniscience to Him. All the knowledge that people have is merely partial discoveries of the knowledge already present in nature, in the universe and in God’s mind. But since we have a tiny fraction of the intelligence of God, we are able to have a tiny fraction of God’s knowledge. But sometimes we get carried away by our ego and assert our importance forgetting that God holds the strings to our puppet-like lives. We need to accept any knowledge we have with a good dose of humility.

We can look at omnipresence from two viewpoints. 1. God’s viewpoint. This, as already mentioned, is that all knowledge is “contained” in God, and manifest in the universe. The intricate biochemistry and biological functions in all of us are beyond our full understanding. Even if we know why a function occurs in us, we do not know how it occurs. Similarly, we have minimal knowledge of our solar system, and next to nothing of the infinite universe. Yet all the knowledge is in God’s mind and only He knows how and why we are all here, and our ultimate destiny. 2. Human viewpoint. In spiritual teaching it is often stated that if you know the basic component of things then you do not have to know the individual things in their various forms. For example, if you know gold, then you know that it is gold in the bangles, earrings, brooches, necklaces etc. If you know clay, then you know that everything made of clay is just clay. If you know one mountain, what need is there to try to know every mountain? By extension, if you know the basic component of all things in the universe, then you do not have to know each thing in the universe. This type of knowledge is meaningful only after you have withdrawn your physical senses from the material universe, and turned your mind inwards to “see” the basis of all existence. When you know God, is there any need to know in detail all the things that proceeded from God? You now know the source. This is the teaching of the masters.

Teaching of the Masters (Part 7)

RELIGION! The very word conjures up the positive feelings of faith, hope, reverence and salvation. In many others it conjures up the negative feelings of brainwashing its adherents, priest-craft, moneymaking, unproven dogmas, and that religion preys upon the gullibility of people. Still, there are others in whom religion conjures up hardly any sentiment at all. Such diversity of reactions, or lack of them, depends on the varying levels of religious awareness of people. Some people believe, without questioning, in what is written in their holy books, or in what they are taught by religious teachers. Some people question all the basic tenets on which religion is based, and, by not finding adequate answers, they relegate religion to the “dusty storage areas” of their minds. Some people become atheists and deny the existence of God, while others become agnostics because they do not know whether or not God exists. Thus there are these four categories of people:

1. Those who believe in God and adhere to a religion;
2. Those who are atheists and deny the existence of God and thus follow no religion;
3. Those who are agnostics, not knowing whether or not God exists, and thus they “sit on the fence”, and
4. Mystics. These people get only a fleeting glance, or none at all from the public.

The reason is that its adherents follow no organized religion, and seek no praise or recognition, but quietly endeavor to realize God within themselves and in others. To this group belong the saints and saviors of the world. To this group God is the only Reality on which the transitory manifestations of the world and the universe depend for their existence. In this article I shall outline what religion really is, and how it can be used to achieve the goal which its adherents wish to achieve.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define religion. The word is derived from Latin “re” which means “back or again”, and “ligere” which means to “bind or tie”. It thus means to “re-unite or bind again”. Now, what needs to be re-united or bound together again? The answer to this question will supply the foundation on which religion exists. Religion deals with the Soul and God. The soul is often erroneously thought to be separate from God, and it is the work of religion to make its followers realize the unity of the Soul and God. The Soul is Spirit, and God is Spirit. Neither can be sub-divided. “Re-uniting” them is thus the sole function of religion. All other virtues, good deeds, forms of worship, love, charity, kindness, purity of heart, etc., are mere details that prepare the person for realization of that UNITY. Knowledge obtained by constant training and practice, and not mere belief, is necessary for this realization. This experience is called Self-Realization, or God Realization, or Liberation, or Salvation of the Soul. When the soul becomes aware of its own Eternity, it must, by definition, be saved, and the work of religion comes to an end.

As you can see, the goal of life is Self-Realization, which is the same as God Realization. Religion is only the means by which this realization takes place. Yet there are many people who make religion the goal instead of the means, and end up causing much religious strife, confusion,

intolerance, bigotry and hypocrisy. If we are to progress spiritually, we must effectively use religion as a tool to achieve the desired end. Professor Allport stated: "Religion is the search for a value underlying all things, and as such is the most comprehensive of all the possible philosophies of life. A deeply moving religious experience is not readily forgotten, but is likely to remain as a focus of thought and desire". The "value underlying all things" is God, Who is Omnipresent. Lord Buddha said: "The gift of religion exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of religion exceeds all sweetness; the delight of religion exceeds all delight; the extinction of thirst overcomes all things".

Religion is said to be the lengthened shadow of one man. Such a man is a saint, a prophet, a saviour, or a Satguru (Eternal Teacher). There have been many of them in the world. Their pure "shadows", however, have been distorted by "clouds" super-imposed by well meaning religionists who are often swept up by "Religious Mania", and lose sight of a logical, simple and natural approach to a religious life. Such religionists, though zealously motivated, are at varying levels of spiritual darkness, or conversely, of spiritual wisdom. Spiritual enlightenment comes only when the mind is set free from the various prevailing dogmas and doctrines, and is allowed to inquire within where the seat of all wisdom resides. In this connection Allan Watts stated "The work of the church ends when the knowledge of God begins". Spiritual ignorance is the greatest handicap to a spiritual life, and spiritual ignorance is rampant in the world. How then can people derive any benefit from the religious life they are following?

Over seventy-five percent of the world population belongs to a religion. Examine the current problems in the world, and examine the hearts of people and try to correlate the world situation with the number of religious people in the world. Can you not allow yourself to ask the question: "What is religion doing for the world?" Think of the wars and bloodshed of innocent victims; the murders, suicides, abortions, child sexual abuse, pornography; hate, greed, intolerance, anger, selfishness, cheating, stealing, lying, bribery, etc. One does not need to extend the list further. How can people have peace, harmony and love when so many things all around are disruptive and anxiety producing? The infallible Law of Karma will definitely see to it that suffering continues until everyone cleans his or her spiritual house. In connection with the suffering in the world, Guru Kabir stated "The secret of escape from this plight is within your body. But you do not find it because, with lamp in hand, you search for it outside of yourself". The whole creation is engulfed in the fire of passions and sorrows, and consumed by worldly desires and ambitions. Without the knowledge imparted by the Master, man, the bond-slave, will keep on wandering aimlessly. Guru Kabir says: "Listen dear seeker! A day will come when you will have to pass from here, leaving behind even the loin -cloth covering your nakedness. Of what value are all your worldly desires".

What then do we need to do to improve the world and ourselves? The world's well being depends on the well being of each one of us. In order to make any progress, we must first set the mind free from the shackles of those religious teachings that are not consistent with the realization of the unity of the Soul and God. This unity can be realized only when life is purified to the utmost, by discarding all passions of lust, anger, attachment, greed and egotism, and replacing them with love, service, giving, humility and meditation. These must be practiced from childhood, so that the personality can be molded into a spiritual one, and they must be practiced daily so that they become automatic manifestations of the personality. Only then can the purified

soul realize its UNITY with the pure Being of God. This is the ultimate goal of all of us that the masters teach us.

Religious Conversions

Religious conversions have been going on for about 2000 years, and in nearly all parts of the world. Generally, it has been the adherents of one religion converting people of another religion to beliefs and practices of their own religion. It also includes people who have had no religion and are converted to follow the religion of the converter. Since religion plays a great role in the lives of most people, it is important to examine the reason and why it is taking place.

According to Webster's dictionary, conversion is a converting or being converted: a change from lack of faith towards religious belief; adoption of a religion; a change from one belief, religion, doctrine, opinion etc. to another. From this definition, it would appear that a person initiates the process of conversion by himself. This would mean that there has been no undue influence, promise, allurements or instigation. In practice, however, it is usually the other way around, when adherents from one religion convert people of another to their own.

Let us examine some of the factors that are operational. Harold Rosen, an interfaith educator, has summarized that there are four categories of attitudes towards the religions of all others: No. 1. Exclusivity – My religion is the only true one. No. 2. Inclusivity – my religion contains the truths of all others. No. 3. Plurality – each religion has its own respectable truths and values. No. 4. Progressive Unity – all religions have One Source, and will progressively converge.

From the above four definitions, it becomes clear that only the first two are involved in propagating conversions. Since God is Universal Being, and equally available to all religions, no religion has the exclusive rights to the truths. Religious founders have taught fundamental truths that are basic to all religions, even if the wordings are different. We need to remember that teachers of humanity have come at different times, in different locations, using different languages, and had to use metaphors applicable to their particular circumstances. This does not negate the fact that the truth is fundamentally one. The very word religion derives from the Latin re-ligare which means to reunite. In a spiritual sense, it means to reunite the soul with God. This is the essential unity, and truth, and all the scriptures, doctrines, dogmas and rituals are only corollaries to this truth. Therefore, both exclusivity and inclusivity cannot hold the absolute truth.

The third factor of plurality is more in keeping with Spirituality. However, the problem arises that adherents of each religion will have different ideas and practices relating to truths and values. Since spiritual truths are the same, having the same source in Divinity, plurality will miss the point. There can never be harmony.

Progressive unity which holds that all religions have One Source is definitely true. The source is God. God is one. The spirit is one. The universe in which God manifests is one. The consciousness of God is one. The energy of God is one. The intelligence of God is one. Thus, there is enough reason to believe that all religions have One Source.

Religious people have different reasons for wanting to convert others. They may feel a sense of superiority of their religion, or seek to increase their adherents, or satisfy a religious ego, or wanting to “save” others. Usually it is the more educated and economically advantaged who seek to convert the uneducated and materially disadvantaged people. The latter will often convert in order to improve their circumstances. In doing so they often suffer family breakups and isolation from their own communities. Life may become more difficult for them.

Since God is not partial to any one religion, it is not the spiritual thing to do to convert others. Definitely broadcast the teachings, as all the teachers of humanity have done, and let the spiritual seeds fall on whatever fertile heart is ready to receive them. It is important for us to recognize the generic Divinity in the hearts of all, and have love for all.

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Use and Ab-Use of Religion

RELIGION! The very word conjures up the positive feelings of faith, hope, reverence and salvation. In many others it conjures up the negative feelings of brainwashing its adherents, priest-craft, moneymaking, unproven dogmas, and that religion preys upon the gullibility of people. Still, there are others in whom religion conjures up hardly any sentiment at all. Such diversity of reactions, or lack of them, depend on the varying levels of religious awareness of people. Some people believe, without questioning, in what is written in their holy books, or in what they are taught by religious teachers. Some people question all the basic tenets on which religion is based, and, by not finding adequate answers, they relegate religion to the “dusty storage areas” of their minds. Some people become atheists and deny the existence of God, while others become agnostics because they do not know whether or not God exists. Thus there are these four categories of people:

1. Those who believe in God and adhere to a religion;
2. Those who are atheists and deny the existence of God and thus follow no religion;
3. Those who are agnostics, not knowing whether or not God exists, and thus they “sit on the fence”, and
4. Mystics. These people get only a fleeting glance, or none at all from the public. The reason is that its adherents follow no organized religion, and seek no praise or recognition, but quietly endeavor to realize God within themselves and in others. To this group belong the saints and saviors of the world. To this group God is the only Reality on which the transitory manifestations of the world and the universe depend for their existence. In this article I shall outline what religion really is, and how it can be used to achieve the goal which its adherents wish to achieve.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define religion. The word is derived from Latin “re” which means “back or again”, and “ligere” which means to “bind or tie”. It thus means to “re-unite or bind again”. Now, what needs to be re-united or bound together again? The answer to this question will supply the foundation on which religion exists. Religion deals with the Soul and God. The soul is often erroneously thought to be separate from God, and it is the work of religion to make its followers realize the unity of the Soul and God. The Soul is Spirit, and God is Spirit. Neither can be sub-divided. “Re-uniting” them is thus the sole function of religion. All other virtues, good deeds, forms of worship, love, charity, kindness, purity of heart, etc., are mere details which prepare the person for realization of that UNITY. Knowledge obtained by constant training and practice, and not mere belief, is necessary for this realization. This experience is called Self-Realization, or God Realization, or Liberation, or Salvation of the Soul. When the soul becomes aware of its own Eternity, it must, by definition, be saved, and the work of religion comes to an end.

As you can see, the goal of life is Self-Realization, which is the same as God Realization. Religion is only the means by which this realization takes place. Yet there are many people who make religion the goal instead of the means, and end up causing much religious strife, confusion, intolerance, bigotry and hypocrisy. If we are to progress spiritually, we must effectively use religion as a tool to achieve the desired end. Professor Allport stated: “Religion is the search for a value underlying all things, and as such is the most comprehensive of all the possible philosophies of life. A deeply moving religious experience is not readily forgotten, but is likely to remain as a focus of thought and desire”. The “value underlying all things” is God, Who is Omnipresent. Lord Buddha said: “The gift of religion exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of religion exceeds all sweetness; the delight of religion exceeds all delight; the extinction of thirst overcomes all things”.

Religion is said to be the lengthened shadow of one man. Such a man is a saint, a prophet, a saviour, or a Satguru (Eternal Teacher). There have been many of them in the world. Their pure “shadows”, however, have been distorted by “clouds” super-imposed by well meaning religionists who are often swept up by “Religious Mania”, and lose sight of a logical, simple and natural approach to a religious life. Such religionists, though zealously motivated, are at varying levels of spiritual darkness, or conversely, of spiritual wisdom. Spiritual enlightenment comes only when the mind is set free from the various prevailing dogmas and doctrines, and is allowed to inquire within where the seat of all wisdom resides. In this connection Allan Watts stated “The work of the church ends when the knowledge of God begins”. Spiritual ignorance is the greatest handicap to a spiritual life, and spiritual ignorance is rampant in the world. How then can people derive any benefit from the religious life they are following?

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What then do we need to do to improve the world and ourselves? The world’s well being depends on the well being of each one of us. In order to make any progress, we must first set the mind free from the shackles of those religious teachings that are not consistent with the realization of the unity of the Soul and God. This unity can be realized only when life is purified to the utmost, by discarding all passions of lust, anger, attachment, greed and egotism, and replacing them with love, service, giving, humility and meditation. These must be practiced from childhood, so that the personality can be molded into a spiritual one, and they must be practiced daily so that they become automatic manifestations of the personality. Only then can the purified Soul realize its UNITY with the pure Being of God. This is the ultimate goal of all of us.

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The Death of Religion?

What a startling statement! How can religion die? It appears that an explanation is necessary. We need to analyze this statement in order to arrive at a full meaning of what it implies.

Religions, in one form or another, has been in the world since antiquity. It appears that there in an innate urge to believe in some Superior Being or beings, or powers, which regulate the activities of the world, and the universe. This Supreme Being or power controls the activities of humans. Because people find themselves helpless in controlling the forces of nature, and birth and death, and various types of miseries, they feel impelled to believe that there is a power that is superior to humans, and this power has influence in all the activities in life and in nature. Since this superior power appears to be, or is, eternal, how does it make sense to talk about the death religion?

If we look around the world, we will see that there are many religions being practiced according to their particular doctrines and dogmas. Each religion has good teachings for the improvement of human welfare. Each teaches to have love for one another, and to be charitable to others. Each teaches to live a righteous life, and to be good at heart, and to be good human beings. Now look at the activities of the various people belonging to the various religions. What do you find? People behave, more or less, in the same way, no matter to which religion they belong. Their desires, motivations, aspirations, basic needs, passions, and other human attributes are the same. There are people in every religion who are dishonest, cheaters, hostile, prejudiced,

selfish, fanatic, violent, along with other undesirable behaviour. Many of these same people will swear by their religion about their religiosity. Can we take their assertions at face value? When actions speak louder than words, can we interpret their actions as consistent with the teachings of their religion? Has religion failed these people, or have these people failed their religion? These are questions that need to be examined by everyone if religion is to have any meaning.

Dr. Julian Johnson talking about religions stated, “The poverty of all religions has been their inability to make God real to their devotees”. How do religions fail to make God real to their devotees? If you examine the ways in which religions are practiced, then you will find that the teachers of religion instruct the laity to attend their respective churches, to recite their prayers, and to sing hymns, to practice certain rites and rituals, to make offerings to the church, and to develop a common bond between their adherents. They instruct about doing good towards others. We can at once see that all of these things are external practices. The teachings of religions do not percolate down to the hearts of their devotees, and do not form the basis for the conduct of life. God is, obviously, universal spiritual being. How can religion make such a God real to humans? God dwells in the hearts of all beings. For religions to make God real to their devotees, they must teach them how to realize God in themselves, and in the hearts of all beings. But religions do not do this. The so called religious authorities and instructors seem to be content in teaching the paraphernalia of religion, rather than teaching the essence—the spirituality—which is the foundation of all religions. If this fact is not recognized by the religious authorities, then they cannot adequately instruct their devotees to follow “the living religion”. Religion is dying a slow death, being eroded from the inside. The heart of religion is becoming hollow. Religious principles are not being followed in life. Instead dogmatism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, bigotry, and religious isolationism are widely practiced. There was once the slogan “God is dead”. Karl Marx stated “religion is the opium of the people”. There are teachings about the Anti-Christ, the Devil, Satan and other nefarious powers corrupting the hearts of humanity. When God is the Supreme Power dwelling in the hearts of all, how can any negative power sway the heart of humanity away from God? If religions give power to such negative agents, then how can the power of God manifest in the hearts of humanity? Believers in religion do themselves an injustice, allowing themselves to be weak, or to be ignorant, for they do not see that the power of God is above the power of all negative agents. Swami Vivekananda stated, “Religion is the manifestation of divinity in man”. How can any negative power assail that divinity which is in the hearts of all beings? Once human beings have lost spirituality, they will continue to be deluded by the external trappings and negative teachings, and they will fail to obtain the positive benefits and teachings of the “true religion”. Voltaire stated, “The tolerance of all religions is a law of nature, stamped on the hearts of all men”. Do people realize that religion is stamped on their hearts? Do they realize that divinity dwells there? So long as they are not in touch with that divinity which dwells within them, they will be subject to all types of delusions and wrong teachings and thinking. A. C. Bouquet states, “The essential function of religion is to integrate life”. Is religion integrating the life of its adherents? If any thing, people are becoming more disintegrated in life. Everything in life is in high gear, moving at a rapid pace. Changes are occurring, and people have difficulty coping with their personal, social, economic and political lives. There is disintegration all around the world. People’s bodies, minds and souls are no longer working in harmony, so how can their lives be integrated? Certainly religion has not helped to integrate life.

Religion is supposed to bring peace, contentment, happiness and bliss. People certainly have not derived these benefits from their religions. The Upanishads of India states, "The Infinite is bliss; there is no bliss in what is finite". The Infinite refers to the Supreme Being. Realization of this Supreme Being in one's own heart is what brings peace, contentment and bliss. To be wrapped up in the finite and mundane cannot give bliss. They are only sources of problems if not understood from a spiritual view point. Lord Buddha stated, "The gift of religion exceeds all gifts; the sweetness of religion exceeds all sweetness; the delight of religion exceeds all delight; the extinction of thirst overcomes all things". Do people realize that religion is their greatest gift, the greatest sweetness, the greatest delight and the quencher of all their materialistic thirsts? Certainly it does not appear so. Shri Ramakrishna stated, "The soul that has tasted the sweetness of divine bliss finds no happiness in the common pleasures of the world". Has the human soul tasted the sweetness of divine bliss? People do not have bliss in their hearts; instead, they are pre-occupied with stresses, anxieties, depressions, and are swayed by materialistic forces. People have lost their spiritual bearings and self-mastery. They are forever seeking pleasure in external things, and suffer disappointments. They need to pay attention to the soul which is, according to Swami Vivekananda, "potentially divine". Jesus stated, "What shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul". People all over the world are forfeiting their soul for their materialistic, worldly pursuits. Jesus also taught to "Love thy neighbor as thy self". Is this occurring in the world? Look at the simple ten commandments such as "Honour thy father and thy mother", and "Thou shall not kill". How many people in the world are following these simple commandments? These are religious teachings. Mahatma Gandhi stated, "Every act has its spiritual, economic, and social implications. The spirit is not separate. It cannot be". If people will accept that the spirit of God is in-dwelling, and allow that spirit to motivate their economic and social activities, then indeed they will be practicing true religion.

From the foregoing discussion, is it not proper to talk about the death of religion? Dr. Albert Schweitzer, writing about Christianity stated, "...it is accommodating itself to the spirit of the age by adopting a kind of modern worldliness. Like other organized bodies it is at work to make good, by ever stronger and more uniform organization, its claim to be a body justified by history and practical success. But just in proportion as it gains in external power it loses in spiritual". Religion needs to gain in spiritual power, not external power. The spiritual power is gained by the realization of people of the divine power residing within their own hearts. Religion is indeed dying a slow death, as more and more material progress is being made. There are more and more people staying away from organized religion, because they find many inconsistencies, hypocrisies, limitations, and stifling of the spirit, which is free from dogmatism, fanaticism and fundamentalism. Guru Kabir stated, "Practice a virtuous, spiritual life for this is the only thing that will go with you". Everything else we struggle for in this life will remain right here. But our good actions, in thought, word and deed, will be our companion when we depart from this physical body. They will constitute "the seed" which will bear fruit in the future, either in this life or in another life. The soul is eternal and will not cease to exist. But in order for God to manifest his consciousness as spirit in this world, the soul will continue to take on bodies as vehicles for the manifestation of God's consciousness.

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The Language of God

We need to realize something to which we do not pay much attention, and that is the “Language of God”. People say that God has written His Word, or God’s Word is written in scripture. Scripture means that which is written i.e. the script. The person who writes is called a scribe. (And if you write something which no one can understand it is called a scribble.) And if it is written about life, soul or God, then it becomes scripture. But, nevertheless, it is still written by people, who have had inner awakening (enlightened people), or they have been attuned to God. But how often are we aware of what language God uses to communicate with us? Does God rely on the scripture to communicate with us? Or, should we rely on the scripture to communicate with God? If we say that the scripture communicates with us, on behalf of God, try to examine if that is correct. Scripture definitely gives us instruction. It gives us ideas. It gives us motivation. It gives us fellowship with other like-minded people. It helps to put us on the right path, towards God. But scripture is not anything more than written instruction or explanation, or prayers, which we say in order to help us to understand what the instruction is. Or, what we expect of God. But is that really what God wants of us? If we say that the scripture is the communication of God, then in what language will God communicate?

The world is full of thousands of languages, and also different dialects. People all over the world do not understand the same language. If God spoke in Hindi, perhaps, half a billion people would understand Him, and five billion will not. If He spoke in English, perhaps, one and a half billion would understand Him, and three or four billion will not. If He spoke in Chinese, perhaps, a billion will understand Him, and the rest will not. Yet, God has spoken to people all over the world, no matter to what language they belong. So what is this secret that God has? What is His language? If we analyze the situation, it is obvious that God does not have a spoken language, belonging to a certain region. We can say that God has no language. And, yet, we can say that God has all the languages, because the teaching of God has been expressed in all the languages. God is beyond the confines of language.

Did God dictate to any person what to write? Usually it is not a dictation by God. What it is, is a dictation of the mind of that person, who has been enlightened, or who had some intuitive inner communion, or communication with God, and so God speaks to his heart; to his intellect. God gives him a certain awakening, and impels him in a certain way, or directs his mind in a certain way to say certain things. But God does not actually give him the words. The words come because of the language prevalent where that person lives. So if God were to come to Canada to speak to the Canadian people, His scripture will be written in English or, perhaps, French if He were in Quebec. But would God really use English? Is it not more likely that English happens to be the language of the person who wishes to write about his insights? So when you analyze the whole situation of how God talks to people, it is not like talking in words. God’s language supersedes all words – all languages put together – because God speaks to the heart. God speaks to your feelings; to your own inner mind – your consciousness. Therefore, there is no need for language. Whatever language you grow up in, whatever language you use, God will speak to you, as an inner awakening in you. Then you use the language, which you are familiar with, to

express what you feel God wants to impart to you, or to the people. So that is how God speaks to us.

Now what do we have to do, in order to listen to what God is saying? We all know that God expects something from us. It may not be a material thing. People say that God expects us to glorify Him, to honor Him, to do devotion to Him, to love Him, etc. Try to understand how far will we rise in spiritual life, if we did devotion to God and thanked Him, honored Him, loved Him, wherever He is. How far will it uplift us, spiritually? Guru Kabir has said: pothi parhi parhi jag muv, pandit bhaya na koi; ekai akhar prem ka, parhe so pandit hoi (People have read many scriptures and have died, but have not become spiritually learned. If they read the one word 'love' then they will indeed become learned). We are taught to read the scriptures of whatever language we are familiar with, and we can recite the scriptures, and we can talk to people about what the scripture tells us. But Guru Kabir has taught that the world has read scriptures; argued and debated about them, split hairs about their meanings, and formed different sects because of different doctrines and interpretations of the same scriptures. In this case, he is using the word pandit, which means to be knowledgeable about God. Guru Kabir says that we will truly know God, if we learn only the word love. So what does he mean by that? God is Love and Love is God, and Love is what we express towards God; and since God manifests in the hearts of all beings, Guru Kabir is saying that we have to love all beings. Only when we love all beings can we love God. So the language God uses is not a written language. Language has come about because of the consciousness and the intelligence God has given us. We are the instruments, because of our location, our geography, our culture and our time. God's language varies according to us, not according to Him. His language is always one of inner awakening, a realization, and there is no word in any language to explain that condition which we arrive at by attuning ourselves to God. So how are we going to describe that? That is why saints always speak in parables. The parable is to try to use concrete examples of things that people are familiar with, and try to explain what God is teaching.

Now God does not come and teach anybody any particular thing. But God tells us that if we are attuned to Him, we realize there is a Great Power, and that Power resides within us, and for us to know that Power, we have to go inward within ourselves and reach the source. Let me make a comparison. We see a lighted bulb. Let us say the electricity has consciousness, or it is intelligent and can think, and the bulb is you and the consciousness is in you. But there is a source, let us say the power house, sending the electricity to this bulb, and the bulb, by means of that 'intelligent electricity' manifests consciousness and life. Now, if this bulb which is you, i.e. the physical body, wants to communicate with the power house to see where the source is, how will it do it? It has a scripture. It has a road map with specific directions how to proceed. The description is clear, but if this bulb, endowed with consciousness, continues to read the instruction from one day to the next to the next, will it find the source? It cannot. It has to do something to get there. It has to actually get up and go to the power house, which is the source. But if we want to reach God, how are we going to do that? The easiest way for this bulb, which is likened to us and has some intelligence or consciousness, to communicate with the power house, is to go back through the electricity. Go back into itself, attune itself with the electric current which goes right back to the power house, which is the source.

Similarly, if we want to get to God, can we do it by going externally – by any external means, devised by any person, anywhere in the world? Where are you going to go to meet God? Is

there a place where you can go to meet Him physically? The scriptures tell us that God is within you. Guru Kabir said that God is in the breath of your breath. He also said: *ghunghat ke pat khol re, toko piya milenge*. (Remove the external veil of ignorance, and you will see the Divine Master within you). For us then to get to God, we have to turn our consciousness from the external things, turn it inward, because it is our inner being that is connected with God. It is nothing external. No matter how much instruction we read, if we do not do it, we cannot get to God. Many people are fooled in this world thinking that they will recite the scripture everyday dutifully, or they will do their rituals, or they will meditate on God. Whatever teaching they have, they will use that method, and they are going to say that they are going to go to God. But don't you know that God is already within you. Does God want you to go and find Him somewhere? Did He lay down a path that is external to you where you can go and find Him? No one has been able to find an external path to God yet. That is why Guru Kabir has said: *jag khojat hare...* (The whole world has searched and has failed to find a path to God, because they are searching outside of themselves). They want to find God in some holy person, or a holy place, or a temple, or in a holy cave, or in a mountain, or holy river. But Guru Kabir's teaching is that the secret is this: That God is already with you. You do not have to go anywhere. Only remove your own ignorance; control your desires; control your mind and realize that God is already within you. So where are you going to find God? You have to use your mind to direct you on the proper inner path.

Hence the mind becomes an instrument. Your intellect becomes an instrument. Your body becomes the instrument, and the path is without language, without direction, without distance; you are already with God. You just have to know that. And what the saints tell us: Be still and know that God is already with you. There is no place to which you have to go. There is no particular scripture that God wants. There is no particular ritual or ceremony that will get you to God. If they did, then all the people, who are praying in the whole world, and reading all their scriptures, and doing all their ceremonies, would have already attained God. And what does attaining God mean? To attain God means that you have love in your heart, you have compassion, forgiveness, humility and kindness. Do all the people praying in the whole world at this moment have compassion, forgiveness, humility and kindness. Are you seeing that in the world? You don't. Because the very premise that you have to find God somewhere external to yourself is wrong. Guru Kabir has said that when he searched his own soul, then he found that: *lali mere lal ki, jit dekhu tit lal, lali dekhan mai gai, mai bhi ho gai lal*. (My beloved God is with me all the time, no matter where I looked; I have become dyed in His colour). That is when you are united with God. When you are united with God, you see that every other being is united with God, and there is no separation. So we come back then to the language of God and the scripture.

Scripture is only a means to an end. It is not the end itself. Religion is a means to an end, it is not an end in itself. Ceremonies, rituals, fasting, observances and prayers are all means to an end. They are not ends in themselves. But many people feel that these practices are ends in themselves, so they perform them with utter devotion. Obviously, that is not correct. That is why Guru Kabir has said: *jap mare, ajapa mare, anahad hu mare jai, nam sanehi na mare, kahe kabir batai*. (Let the recitation of the scripture and the prayers die, if they have to; let the inner sound, the Divine Melody die, if it has to; but let the lover of the Name that is within you not die, because that is God, Himself.)

Guru Kabir's teaching tries to remove confusion based on scriptures, various religions, doctrines, ceremonies, and observances, and he shows you the quick and easy path to God realization. That is why he said *santo sahaj samadhi bhali*: (O saints! The easy union with God is the only and the best union), and you do not find that outside. He said: *kahu so sumiran*. (Whatever words I speak becomes a prayer). Further, he said: *uthat baithat kabahu na bisre*. (Whether I get up, stand or lay down, God is never separate from me). He said: *jab sou tab karu dandawat* (When I sleep it becomes my prostration to God) [Danda is a stick, thus lying prostrate like a stick]. But it is not dandawat until you have God in your heart. When God is in your heart your sleeping becomes your prostration to God. In similar ways Guru Kabir is showing that you do not have to go to find God somewhere, because God is with you. Open the veil of ignorance, remove the Maya (illusion) and you will find God dwelling within you already.

If that were not so why would Guru Kabir make such a strong statement like: *mandir toro, masjid toro, to kuch nahi mujhaka hai, dil mat toro kisi ka bande, yaha ghar khas khuda ka hai* (You may break the temple and the mosque; it is of no great consequence. But O my devotee! Do not break the heart of anyone, because the heart is indeed the dwelling place of God). If you break the heart of someone, and then you go and pray in a physical temple, would God accept your prayer? We must not be fooled. We must have our thinking straight. If we do wrong things to our fellow human beings, and then we go and pray in a physical temple, would God be pleased? Will we get closer to God? Does it make sense? God has created that temple in your own heart and He dwells there. So we must accept the physical temple, in which we are sitting, as a means of coming together to do satsang, in order to know God and to enrich our lives spiritually.

Your heart is God's temple. The temple built by your hands is your temple. Your temple is supposed to teach you how to know God's temple. Does that make sense? What is the purpose of the temple which you have built? Are you going to catch God and bring Him and put Him in that temple, and then pray to Him? Don't you see the logic, that when you have created your temple, your temple is supposed to teach you that you are God's temple. But people do not get that teaching, unfortunately. Of course, they learn about God, about the soul, how to pray, how to sing, how to have reverence for the Word of God, but do they have reverence for God, Himself? Do people have reverence for God, when they do not recognize God in their brothers and sisters. The heart of everyone is a temple of God. So what do we do? Do we rely on the verbal language written in any scripture, in any language of the world, or do we rely on that 'language' which speaks directly to our heart, no matter what language we use, in whatever part of the world.

What is the language of the heart? Guru Kabir said to submit to that language which teaches you the way to God, i.e. to go within yourself. That is why he told the scholar: *tu kahata hai kagad lekhi, my kahta tu akhan dekhi* (You are telling me all the things you have read in your books, but I am telling you what I know within myself, that I have seen with my Divine vision). He did not say to go and read any scripture, of any language and then you will know God. No! You can talk about the scripture, because it is a language. But that language does not give you God. That is why Alan Watts said: "When the knowledge of God begins the work of the church ends". Religion is a path. It is a path to something, and in this case it is to God. When you have arrived at the destination of God, what need is there for the religion? You may say do not burn the bridge that you crossed. You do not destroy the religion. There are many people along that

path. But for each individual, who has already crossed that bridge and reached God, does he still have to keep on crossing that bridge? He does not have to, because he has arrived at his destination. The destination to which religions lead you is God. So let us use religion as a means to attain God. Religions have enough instruction in all the various scriptures, about what you should do, how you should live and conduct yourself in devotion and prayer etc. But they are just like road maps. If you do not travel them, you are going to get nowhere. That travelling has to be done internally. There is no external way to get to God.

Sakhi:

**jaise jaise man chale, taise hi karm hoi;
jo man sidhe chale, sidhe hi karm hoi.**

(As your mind wanders, so will be your actions; when your mind is concentrated, your actions will be perfect).

A steady mind manifests steadfast actions. It will be directed to reach that one goal – God realization – which you are attempting to reach from week to week, day to day, through satsangs, through bhajans, through prayers, and through good deeds. That path is within you; still your mind, give up all the kam, krodh, moha, lobha, ahamkar (lust, anger, attachment, greed and ego), and wash out all the filthy things you may have in your mind. Make your mind pure and turn it inward, where the source is, and that will lead you to the Universal Source, which is Cosmic Consciousness or God Consciousness. So in the name of Satguru, I have tried to explain the inner journey, which means that you have to still the mind, by removing all the external obstacles and passions, and meditatively, know God in your own heart.

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The Universality of Religions

Can we really afford to live without religion? If you ask yourself that question, some of you might say yes, you can. There are many atheists in the world who do not believe in religion. But is their understanding of religion the same as a mystic saint would understand religion? Religion really is a path, and it comes from the Latin word re ligere. Re means again and ligere means to tie. The English word ligature, which means to tie a knot, is derived from this root. So you tie two things together. You try to unite yourself with a Being, the Supreme Being, and that union is what religion teaches. We must understand then that religion is a path. We must have that clear in the mind because religion really is not an end in itself. It is not a goal. Religion is only a means of attaining something. One philosopher stated that the work of the church ends when the knowledge of God begins. That is really a perceptive statement. Religion must take you somewhere, but then religion must end because you have gained freedom; you have gained salvation, and so religion has finished its work. What need is there then for religion? Therefore we must try to understand religion from this basic viewpoint.

There is an underlying value which we all must seek, and that underlying value is that Reality which is within us.

The Encyclopedia Britannica states: “as far as scholars have discovered, there has never existed any people anywhere, at any time, who were not in some sense religious”. Also: “empirically what is called religion includes the mythologies of the pre-literate peoples on the one hand and the abstruse speculations of the most advanced religious philosopher on the other. Historically, religion, both ancient and modern, embraces both primitive religious practices and the esoterically and symbolically refined worship of the more technologically progressive and literate human communities”.

These are only a few quotations to show how religion is important for people in their lives. There is an underlying value which all of us must seek, and that underlying value is that Reality which is within us. That same Reality we call God, and because of the need for seeking that Reality, you will find religions everywhere. Religion depends on the fact that there is suffering in the world, and along with suffering there is death, and as long as these two things exist side by side, there will always be the need for religion.

At this juncture I would like to point out a few facts and figures. Religions are of all kinds. Starting from the east, there is Shintoism which is based on the worshipping of ancestors, nature spirits, ancient heroes etc. by the ordinary people. There is Confucianism based on a philosophical system by Confucius. There is Taoism which is similar to the Vedantic teaching in one God. Tao means the Way. In India there are many religions starting from Hinduism and its various branches such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism and their many subdivisions. There is Buddhism with its branches of Mahayana, Theravada (Hinayana) and Zen Buddhism. In the west you are all familiar with Christianity. There are many branches of Christianity, such as Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox and their innumerable subdivisions. There is Islam with its various branches. The major ones are the Sunni Muslims and the Shiia Muslims. Recently, in Iran and Iraq, these two sects were entangled in deadly warfare because, I think, if you look at it objectively, they do not truly understand or practice what religion is.

Religion started a long time ago and is lost in pre-history. According to researchers, Hinduism started approximately 3500 years B.C. from the Indus Valley civilization. Judaism started approximately 2000 B.C. when God summoned Abraham to give him his message. Jainism started approximately 872 B.C. Zoroastrianism about 628 B.C. Buddhism about 563 B.C. Mohammed was born in 570. He started Islam in 622 A.D. in Medina. Jesus was born 4 B.C. and Christianity started after him. All these are major religions. What do they have to teach us? Essentially, they have taught the same thing i.e. that we must love one another. There are many good quotations that I would really like to quote. Bhagwandas (The Essential Unity of Religions) said: “To uproot religion successfully we must first exterminate pain and death. So long as human beings experience and fear these, they will not cease to crave the consolation of religions. Also, so long as men and women are left, are encouraged and even positively taught to believe that religions differ, even in essentials, so long will they as the followers of such different religions also continue to differ, to quarrel, to fight and to shed each other’s blood. If on the contrary, they are led to see that all religions are one, and the same in essentials, they will also assuredly become one in heart and feel their common humanity in loving brotherhood”.

There are other quotations which I would like to bring to your mind. Jesus said: “Resist not evil. Bless them that curse you. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”. Lord Buddha said: “Conquer hatred with love”. Mohammed said: “Recompense evil, conquer it with good”. Manu said: Be not angry with those who are angry with you. To those who speak harsh words reply with the sweet. Guru Kabir said: Speak sweetly with everyone. It is a charm with good influence. Give up harsh words. Vyas said: With kindness, conquer rage. With goodness, malice. With generosity, defeat all meanness. With the straight truth, defeat lies and deceit. From a Jain sacred text: Conquer your wrath by sweet forgiveness. By humility, check vanity. By truth and straight forwardness stay all crooked fraud. By peaceful contentment, vanquish greed. What does Taoism have to say? They rejoice not if revered, nor be angry if insulted, but they only are capable of this who have passed into the eternal harmony of God. The Bhagwat Gita says: Repay not blow by blow, nor curse by curse, nor by base trick the mean craftiness, but shower blessings in return for blows, curses and mean craftiness. Guru Kabir again said: Keep your critic close to you; give him a hut in your courtyard. Without soap and water he washes your character. What do all these quotations point out? The same essential truth i.e. you always practice love, kindness, charity, goodness, even when people do harm to you. Jesus said: When someone smites you on one cheek turn the other cheek also; and If someone takes your coat, give him your cloak also. Guru Kabir taught the same thing. He was a weaver, and if someone asked him for cloth, he will give him the cloth free even if he did not have money to buy food for himself. This kind of teaching is taught by all the saints in the world, and it is for us to examine the teachings and to try to live by them. Do not get fooled by the various trappings of religion. Religion is only a means and you must reach the goal. But as long as you stick with the details, the ceremonials, the dogmas, the rituals, the creeds and the doctrines, you will not be able to rise above their narrow limitations and achieve the Universal Godhood.

The world population is approximately five billion (When essay was written approx. ten yrs ago). Of those five billion, Christians, in all the various denominations, amount to 33%; the Muslims, of various denominations, are 17%; Hindus, in all the categories, are 13%, others, i.e. the minor religions of the world e.g. Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, etc., amount to about 16%. There are non-religious people in the world who amount to about 16.4% and the atheists are 4.5%. On the whole, approximately 21% of the world population believe in no religion, and 79% believe in religion. Now, in a democratic society, I am sure that you will say that 79% have to be right. If the 79% are right, I wonder what the other 21% are going to do. These same people who are called agnostics and atheists, eventually have to go through the same lessons in life. They also have to live by certain virtuous standards, certain religious principles, even if they do not accept religion. They still believe in what is good. They still believe in loving the people they know and the people whom they feel they should love. I am sure that they are not criminals. They are people just like us and, in the end, we are all on the same path.

As was pointed out earlier, there are many, many paths in life. It does not matter really which path you follow, but if you remain on the path, where are you going to arrive? When will you get to the ‘other end’? If I want to leave here and go to Montreal, but I am on the path between here and Montreal, and I do not want to get out of the path, where will you find me? Right on the path! I will never reach Montreal. Just so in life, there is a goal, and that goal is God. If we adhere to the religion and do not progress towards the goal, then that religion is not serving its

true purpose in our life. The atheists will say that there is no such God, but that does not matter. A blind person might say that there is no light. Or a dumb person will not be able to say certain things, and because he is also deaf he might say that there is no language. Just so, people who are atheists and agnostics might deny the existence of God, but they cannot deny that there is a Power in the universe that has control over their lives also. They all have to live by the same principles. Their bodies function in the same way. Their minds function in the same way. They are all living in the same world. One of the good things about talking about the Universality of Religions is that it makes us be aware that we all live in one world, and religion belongs to all people in the whole world. But let us not forget the goal of religion, and I would like to emphasize that goal. Let us not always stay on the path, because as long as we stay on the path, there will be divisions and no progress. When we step out of the path and see the Reality, and see the Light, and we know that that is the goal, then there will be no divisions, no arguments, no -isms, because then we will have risen above the narrow confines of the path. The path of religion is narrow and we must cross that narrow path and see the wider view of the Divinity that is everywhere, and in all people.

Although people profess to have different religions, creeds, dogmas, rituals and belief systems, in the end, they are all people just like you and me. In the end, there is only one Supreme Power. That Supreme Power we call God, and that God dwells in us and, as Guru Kabir has also taught: we must search for, and find, that Power right within us. We do not have to go to pilgrimages and to do all kinds of austerities, because he taught what is called Sahaj Samadhi (easy realization of union with God). Find that union with God in your own life. It is not difficult. But if you stay only on the path, you will have to read the road map all the time, because you do not know the road. And if you continue only reading the road map, you will never get to where you are going. So let us use religion as a means of getting somewhere, and that somewhere is to realise God within ourselves. If you can do that, then you will see that religion is really universal because all people are the same. God is the same. The Divine power that governs us is the same. We are all united in God.

Although religion is universal in that it deals with the basic inner nature of human beings, it has taken on various outward appearances depending upon the place, time, circumstances and other conditions and developments of the people involved. Since basic human nature is the same, it is easy to conceive that religion should permeate the lives of all people. The great personalities after whom religions of various kinds have been formed over the ages, have used different languages, metaphors, value systems, exhortations, criticisms, illustrations and various other means of communicating religious ideals and feelings to the common people. Duren J.H. Ward, a great German scholar, saw that there existed a connection between race and religion. He states: "...religion gets its character from the people or race who develop or adopt it. ... the same influences, forces and isolated circumstances which developed a special race developed at the same time a special religion which is a necessary constituent element or part of a race..." Hegel, a German philosopher, viewed the whole of human history as a vast movement towards freedom. He stated: "The reality of history is spirit and the story of religion is the process by which spirit... comes to full consciousness of itself. Individual religions thus represent stages in a process of evolution-progressive steps in the unfoldment of spirit – directed toward the great goal at which all history aims". Max Muller, who is often called the father of the history of religions, states: "Particularly in the early history of the human intellect, there exists the most intimate relationship between language, religion and nationality". Through his

studies he found that Asia and Europe had three great races called Turanians, Semites and Aryans. They later divided and spread to various areas, and their language differed. Through their languages, mythologies and literatures he found similarities in the names of the deities, common mythologies and common important religious terms, and similar religious ideas and intuitions.

A few further quotations from different sources will suffice to illustrate that religion is really universal, and that basically the same teachings are taught by all of them, once the external garb of each is removed.

No man liveth unto himself...we are all parts of one another...God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth (Bible)

All creatures are members of the one family of God. (Koran.)

Human beings, all, are as head, arms, trunk and legs one unto another. (Vedas)

Invocation to the one Supreme Spirit of Unity: AUM used by the Hindus: AMIN used by the Muslims: AMEN used by the Christians. (Bhagwandas)

Esoteric philosophy reconciles all religions, strips everyone of its outward human garments and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. (Madame Blavatsky)

Every scripture inspired of God is profitable, for the teaching, for reproof, for correction for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work. (Bible)

We believe in what hath been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is one and to Him are we self-surrendered. (Koran)

Father of all! May Thy Supernal Light inspire, illuminate, and guide our minds! We open them to let thy glory in. (Vedas)

Lord of compassion! All praise unto Thee! Creator and protector of the worlds! Lord God! Beneficent and merciful! ... Thee do we serve and Thee beseech for help. (Koran)

Grant us long life, Great Lord! and fortitude and the right mind, and show us the straight path o'er which thou broodest and which leads to Thee. (Zend Avesta)

O for Great Heaven! We call Thee our father and our mother. (Confucianism)

We are born in the same way from the mother. You and I have the same blood and the same life force pervades us. By which knowledge did we become different? (Guru Kabir)

All human beings are driven by the same basic inner forces. A few great souls who have managed to escape the narrow intellectual and material aspects of life, and realized the Eternal Reality which is universal, have become the teachers of mankind. They have all taught us to live a noble and righteous life of love, harmony, tolerance, service, humility, forgiveness etc. Some will argue that these are only natural and ethical values which help people to live better, and therefore are necessary. But ethics has its roots in religion because religion existed from the beginning of manifested intelligent life, and was only given expression later by people in certain external forms. Religion depends on being aware of the connection which has always existed between man and his origin which is God. This must take precedence over ethics. Thus whatever we may call ethical standards of behaviour must, of necessity, arise out of a religious conviction and awareness. In the final analysis, no one can deny that religion is universal. Similarly, no one can deny that differences, intolerances, bigotry and in-fighting among religions exist. The deficiency is not in religion. It is the ignorance of human beings which causes the problems. If we all lived by the Eternal value systems taught by religion, and

as God intended us to live, then mankind would have taken the greatest step in the unfoldment of his consciousness, and the realization of his Divine purpose in life.

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How Karma Operates

Life is full of conditions, events and life situations that are hard to understand. Sages, philosophers and scientists have tried to find answers with varying results, and the answers found by one are not usually the same as those found by the others. Thus, there are often different streams of thought regarding the same subject such as what is the mind or the soul? Who or what is God? Why is there suffering when God is supposed to be loving and caring? Why is there sin and virtue, or other pairs of opposites? These are some of the questions many people ask. Is there any reasonable answer to them?

Scientists dealing with matter and energy can produce consistent results when they use the same materials, under the same conditions, but they cannot produce the same results when they deal with the mind, soul, God and all the different occurrences and inequalities in life. Study of these subjects fall in the realm of psychology, philosophy, religion and spirituality. These disciplines also do not provide good answers until they delve into the law of cause and effect or the law of karma. This law states simply that we reap what we sow. Since all people do not sow the same things in thoughts, words and deeds, they will not reap the same results. It has to be understood that the law of karma transcends birth and death, and goes along with the eternal soul in an astral form as samskars or latent impressions that will manifest during each lifetime. It is because of these samskars that we see all the variations in every aspect of peoples' lives from conception to death.

Keeping the above in mind, if we wish good things to happen, we have to do good things. We cannot have anger, hate, greed, violence, egoism, lust, jealousy and evil intentions and expect good results. Yet all people expect good things to happen to them, even when they display all the bad and negative behaviour. It simply will not happen. So the violence occurring in the world simply feeds itself in a self-perpetuating manner, as does all negative activities. Good and positive activities will also perpetuate themselves. Bad things in the world will cease only when they are replaced with good, and sufficient time is allowed for the negative karmas to work themselves out in peoples' lives. This may take several lifetimes, but the start has to be made, otherwise there will be no progress in the positive direction. The good must be in thoughts, words and deeds. It all boils down to the fact that good will not produce bad, and bad will not produce good.

Considering the above, how do we decide what is good and what is bad? Different people can have different interpretations of good and bad. We give "value", whether negative or positive, to everything in life. Whatever brings happiness, comfort, self-esteem, respect, enjoyment and good health we say is good. Whatever brings suffering, stress, depression, anxiety and illness we say is

bad. We mold our behaviour according to the “value” we give to things, and according to our behaviour, we reap the fitting results, good or bad.

How do we change our behaviour? First, we need to assess our actions in thoughts, words and deeds and decide if they are good or bad, and make the changes. This will require diligence and perseverance. Second, we need to seek the company of those who can guide us in the “good” direction. Third, we need to get in touch with the “source” of our being. That source is indescribably good, and has given the gift of life. That source is with us and within us.

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The Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi to the World Today

By Urmila Das
For Mahatma Gandhi’s Jayanti

Opening Statement

When I was asked to speak on Gandhiji this evening, the first thought that came to my mind was: What can I say about Gandhiji that you do not already know; we also know the principles of life he lived and preached “are as old as the hills.” As I began thinking, my subsequent thoughts were: “Yes, these principles are as old as the hills, but as human beings are we adhering to these principles?” With these two provoking thoughts, I am going to look at how relevant are those old principles which he preached, and practiced are applicable in the world we live in today.

Short Biographical Sketch

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 in Porbandar, in the State of Gujarat, India. His father was Karamchand Gandhi and his mother Putlibai. He was the youngest child of their family, and fondly remembered his mother as having saintly qualities and was deeply religious. He married at the age of 13 to Kasturba who was 12 years old. He had four sons. He studied Law in London and returned to India in 1891 to practice Law. Gandhiji was not considered an academic with distinction, and it is said that his failure in practicing Law in India lead him to do legal work in South Africa. He stayed in South Africa for 21 years, and during those years Gandhiji developed into the person the world came to know later. One can say that his foundation for the struggle in India was first laid in South Africa. The seeds were planted and germinated on the African Continent, but that tree developed branches and leaves in India. However, the fruits of that tree were and are for all of humanity. According to one writer: “If Gandhi had lived in India thousands of years ago, his life would have been wrapped in myths and miracles.” But Mahatma Gandhi is a man of our times, “which shows that his origin was

ordinary, his childhood normal, his student days uneventful, and his early professional career unsuccessful. Yet, he “was the spokesman for the conscience of mankind.”

Satyagraha

One of Gandhiji’s principles is Satyagraha. Satya means Truth and agraha means firmness or force. Racial discrimination in South Africa awakened Gandhiji’s social conscience (Beck p. 2) and this led him to coin this word. Satyagraha is also translated as Soul-Force. (Fischer p. 35) He not only preached the tenets of Satyagraha, but also lived and acted them. He showed by actual examples how these basic principles could be used to transform the world into a better place. As Gandhiji wrote, “Satyagraha is the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one’s self.” This principle reverses the idea of an-eye-for-an-eye policy which, as he says ends in making everybody blind, or blind with fury. Instead, it returns good for evil until the evildoer tires of evil. (Fischer). Gandhiji preached this idea over a century ago, but this an-eye-for-an-eye vindication is everywhere in the world today. Isn’t this policymaking all of us blind in the world today. Furthermore, he calls it a force which can not only be used by individuals, but by communities – men women and children. It is not a meeting of violence with violence. Instead it is a struggle from within in the purest form (non-violence p.34). When the spirit of Satyagraha becomes pure, then it will become universal, in revolutionizing social ideas, and do away with despotism and the ever growing militarism under which the nations of the west are groaning and are being crushed to death...(p.35-6). By looking around us today, how applicable is this thought by Gandhiji? Today we see men against men and nations against nations fighting with great military strength. This is not the world Gandhiji envisaged. Satyagraha is the noblest and best education. This is the education we badly need today for humanity.

The sage Patanjali compiled the Yoga Sutras, a text which describes the inner workings of the mind, and also provides an eight-step (ashtanga) blueprint for controlling the restless mind, and enjoying lasting peace and happiness. The first among these is the Yamas which is divided into five sections, the first and the second being Ahimsa and Satya. In bringing out his message for the people, Gandhiji constantly dwelt on these principles. Writing in the Harijan, August 11, 1940, Gandhiji said the following about ahimsa: “If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards ahimsa. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase (to hunt). Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for his food. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and from a member of a family he became a member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive ahimsa (non-violence) and diminishing himsa (violence). Had it been otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now, even as many of the lower species have disappeared.” In bringing peace and happiness to man, he further states that “Man as animal is violent, but as Spirit is nonviolent. The moment he awakes to the Spirit within, he cannot remain violent. Either he progresses towards ahimsa or rushes to his doom. That is why the lesson of truth, harmony, brotherhood, justice, etc. are taught – all attributes of ahimsa.” p. 78-79 (All Men are Brothers by Gandhi). As Albert Einstein said “I believe that Gandhi’s views were the most enlightened of all

the political men in our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: not to use violence in fighting for our cause, but by non-participation in anything you believe is evil.”

Economic Independence

Gandhiji used clothing as a way to communicate with the Indian people, and also with the mighty British Empire. Working towards India independence, he identified with 80% of the peasant and illiterate people. He used clothing to express ideas of struggle. From his early childhood, to London and to South Africa he wore the best of European clothing, and also dressed his family in the same way. As the struggle for his people increased, he changed his attire. By the time Gandhiji returned to India in 1915, he knew that clothing could convey important messages, and he consciously chose to dress like an Indian peasant. The strong reactions his clothing elicited from the Indians who met him, further convinced him of the symbolic importance of clothing. Though hesitant at first, Gandhiji saw the loincloth as a sign of India’s poverty, and the need to improve its wealth by producing things at home. (Taro)

For Gandhiji, spinning their own cloth – khadi – at home, was employment for entire villages. This was not only a political decision, but also an economical one. He wanted people to be self-sufficient and to take pride in recreating the industry that was once a cottage industry. “Before the British advent, India spun and wove in millions of homes, but this industry was ruined by industrialization. He was not against machinery, but against the use of machinery at the expense of millions of people. As we all know, industrialization is wealth concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of the many.

Beside the political and economic power, the wearing of khadi according to Gandhiji had a “transformative power” and that “through wearing it people could actually become more worthy.” We may ask ourselves how can this be applicable to today’s society? Most things today are done by mass production and by advanced technology. We live in the age of very sophisticated technology. Of course, this is good. But what has happened to us? We have lost certain skills and, instead, allowed technology to take charge of our lives. Gandhiji not only wanted us to be self-sufficient, but to take pride of our achievements. Gandhiji’s simple attire of loincloth, wooden sandals, a bowl and a walking stick were the possessions of this politician cum saint. Once again I am reminded of another aspect of yoga – aparigraha (non-possession of material wealth) which inspired Gandhiji immensely. He kindled a re-awakening of the deeply rooted thoughts and ideas found in the ancient Indian system. By his actions one cannot deny the fact that he was a Karma Yogi.

Superstition

Gandhi was a very practical person and deeply religious, hence there was no place for superstitious beliefs. Instead, he wanted people to walk in his footsteps, rather than kiss his feet. At the end of a day his feet were full of scratches, because people would grab his feet as he walked. For them it was paying respects to him, to the point of seeing him as God. But Gandhiji said, “I have expressed my horror and strongest disapproval of this type of idolatry.” The illiterate behaved like this because they saw in Gandhiji the strength which will sustain them from the poverty of the world. But there is one instance when a lawyer traveling in the same

train with Gandhiji fell out, head first. When he was picked up he was unhurt, the lawyer said that because he was in the train with Gandhiji he did not get hurt. Laughingly Gandhiji said, “Then you shouldn’t have fallen out at all.” Though people are more technologically advanced today, superstitions still plays a part in people’s lives. Our contribution to Gandhiji is to reject superstitious beliefs and look at the practicality of life. This will enrich our lives.

Summary

We have seen the strength of the frail Gandhiji in many different ways. Just to mention a few – the Salt March, Champara village. After the Jallianwalla Bagh incident in Panjab and the deposing of the Turkish Sultan (Khilafat Movement), he returned the medals which he had received in South Africa, to the British Viceroy and said: “I can retain neither respect nor affection for a government which has been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend its immortality.” Fasting for Gandhiji is his way of going inward for solutions to solve the Indian problem. How many of our leaders today would respond in this way to violence. Instead, we meet in the battle field to settle our differences. Of course, he was accused of using fasting as a political blackmail. But for him he saw it as introspection to problem solving and gaining spiritual strength.

Those of us who were born prior to 30th January 1948, can say that we lived on the same earth where Gandhiji walked and also breathed the same air as him. As Albert Einstein said, “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth”. I know we are remembering his birth, but birth and death are on both sides of the spectrum of life, therefore I would like to quote what the British Delegate at the UN Security Meeting said, “that Gandhi was “the friend of the poorest, the loneliest, and the lost.” Furthermore he stated that Gandhi’s “greatest achievements are still to come.”

The life of Mahatma Gandhi should serve as a beacon of light to guide humanity to a better world. He taught a lesson to all political leaders on how to work great social and political changes for the betterment of humanity in every walk of life. He said, “An India awakened and free has a message of peace and goodwill to give to a groaning world.” We can see his greatness expressed in his own words: “I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths, whether Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Jews. I may say that my heart has been incapable of making any such distinctions.”

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Yoga and Aging

By Urmila Das

Introduction

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word – yug. It is pronounced as YOG, but today it is generally accepted as YOGA. The English equivalent of this word is “yoke”.

Meaning: The meaning of the word yoke is: to yoke a pair of oxen together, bondage, servitude, enslavement, etc. (For more shades of meaning refer to the dictionary)

Yoga on the other hand means “union” i.e. bring two things together. But the meaning of yoga according to the school of Indian Philosophy has a deeper meaning. Yes! It means “union” but what kind of “union”? It is a union of the soul with God and the body. Most importantly Yoga is a path, a way, a lifestyle.

The Four Main Kinds of Yoga

Yoga forms the foundation of Indian philosophy for as long as historians can delve into the ancient history of man. There are evidences of references in our scriptures like the Veda, Upanishads, etc., where our rishis discussed the science of yoga. This ancient science and art form used to be passed down orally from teacher to students, but as years went by, a great Sage by the name of Patanjali organised the system of yoga in a systematic way. For our Seminar today let us look at the four main kinds of yoga:

Raj Yoga – the way of spiritual discipline

Karma Yoga – the way of action

Jnana Yoga – the way of wisdom

Bhakti Yoga – the way of devotion

I would like to discuss in depth Raj Yoga, but before I do so, I will briefly describe Karma yoga, Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.

Karma Yoga: This is the yoga of action or karma. It can be called karma yoga only when the action is done in a selfless way with God as the focus. Actions done in this way do not bind a person to the action, but rather liberate that person towards God.

Jnana Yoga: This is the yoga of knowledge. But what kind of knowledge? It is the knowledge of the reality of the soul and God. As Aristotle said: “There is no nobler occupation than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake”.

Bhakti Yoga: This is the yoga of devotion and of surrendering to God. When bhakti Yoga is practiced then the devotee experiences the presence of God in every part of the universe.

Raj Yoga: In Raj Yoga, the highly evolved seer Patanjali codified this discipline into eight parts, also known as asthanga yoga, e.g.

- Yamas
- Niyamas
- Aasana
- Pranayama
- Pratyahara
- Dharana

- Dhyana
- Samadhi

For a moment let us look at how the foundation blocks were set up. It clearly shows a progressive movement from the external to the internal, whereby one experiences oneself. As we grow in life by adopting such principles to live by we do grow gracefully.

We may ask ourselves what are these yamas and niyamas and what they have to do in making us grow gracefully? Well, the answer is that they mould our lives in a positive way and they are the stepping stones to the anti-aging process. There are five principles of Yamas and five of Niyamas.

Yamas:

Ahimsa – To be non-violent. We must not be violent towards any living being, not even in thought, word or deed.

Satya – Truth. Always be truthful to ourselves and to others.

Asteya – Do not take anything that does not belong to you. We must earn our living honestly and not depend on others.

Brahmacharya – We must be pure in our life and not go after sensual pleasures

Aparigraha – Non hoarding of things. When we accumulate too many material things we feel trapped and lose our freedom.

Niyamas:

Shouch – Cleanliness, also in thought, word and deed.

Santosh – Contentment. Be happy with whatever we have and not long for what others have.

Tapa – Austerity. We must endure some hardship. A pampered life will not help us to grow spiritually.

Swadhyaya – To study and learn each day

Ishwarpranidhana – A longing to realize God in this life.

Aasanas:

In yoga terminology the word aasanas refer to postures of the body. These aasanas emphasize deep breathing, relaxed movements and mental concentration which promote a state of mental and physical well being. Hence the aasanas rejuvenate and bring the physical body in a state of balance with the natural forces of nature.

We may ask what are the physical benefits of these aasanas? The most important is the flexibility of the spine. It is said that ‘you are as young as your spine’. These aasanas focus on increasing and maintaining flexibility of the spine, and also toning and rejuvenating the nervous system. Gentle stretching, twisting, bending movements bring flexibility to the other joints and muscles of the body.

But what about the aging process which we are here to discuss. Yoga helps to slow down the aging process when there is elasticity to the spine, firming up the skin, removing tension from

the body, strengthening the abdominal muscles, correcting poor postures, etc. Thus, we can say that asanas work wonders in bringing awareness to the body and mind.

Here are listed some of the anti-aging effects of asanas as described by Dr. Paul Galbraith, author of "Reversing Aging": longevity; increased resistance to disease; rejuvenation of your glands, (like the pituitary, thyroid, etc.); look and feel younger (reduces wrinkles); improved vision and hearing, and mental/emotional benefits as well. Because of the rejuvenation effects of the glands and nervous system, the practice of asanas enhances the mental and emotional state of the mind of the practitioner."

Pranayama:

No one can live for more than a few minutes without breathing. But what pranayama or yogic breathing does is makes us be aware of the importance of breathing properly. Pranayama or yogic breathing helps to cleanse and nourish the physical body. As you inhale fully, you are supplying an abundance of oxygen to every minute cell of the body. As you exhale the waste products (or toxins) are expelled. It improves and strengthens the respiratory system, increases vitality and energy level. A combination of breathing and deep relaxation will help people overcome anxiety and panic attacks, high blood pressure, etc. Mentally yogic breathing improves concentration and gives clarity of thought. For asanas, pranayama is very important. Asanas can be called asanas only if pranic energy force is used.

Pratyahara:

Withdrawal of the senses from your surroundings. The yoga aspirant who has learned to control sensory attachments to things in the environment and to block attraction to vice is said to have conquered the senses.

Dharana:

Deep concentration of the mind. When the mind has withdrawn from the stimulation of the senses, only then can it focus on a single aim, goal or idea.

Dhyana:

Meditation with intense concentration. At this level the practitioner of yoga concentrates on God and His attributes and the soul, separate from the body and mind. Most important here is the realization that God alone is the Higher Power.

Samadhi:

This is the final stage of Raj yoga when the soul is said to be one with God.

Yoga and the Aging Process:

Let us take a look at our selves. Most of us are stressed from overwork, lack of rest, unhealthy lifestyles and, most important, detachment from ourselves. We live in a world which is highly industrialized and “so-called modern”, whereby with the touch of a button or a switch daily chores are taken care of, yet time seems to be scarce. This modern life style, though it can be beneficial, also does harm to us. To my mind yoga whether it is Karma, Jnana, Bhakti or Raj yoga is the answer to a well-balanced physical, mental and emotional life style. Deep down inside all of us know what is good for our mental, physical and emotional selves. Yoga teaches us to tap into our inner wisdom and as we go through the aging process we see aging as being graceful. One is never too young or old to venture on this way of life.

We must not lose sight of the fact that aging is a universal phenomenon and this phenomenon starts right from birth. Chronological aging is inevitable and there is nothing one can do to change that age. However, what one can do is to let the science of yoga take charge of our physical, mental and emotional being despite the age. For the youth it should be a feeling of joy and beauty of what lies ahead. For the middle age it should be like entering the enlightenment period, where this great knowledge has given a renewed vision of life. With experience, maturity and spare time used creatively life can certainly be graceful. Yoga will take years off your face and add years to your life, hence the ageless appearance.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Deepak Chopra: [Quote] “people do not grow old, when they stop growing they become old.”

1. [Spiritually “in the realm of the spirit there is no ageing.”]
2. [Hand-on activity – not theory but practice]

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Bad Actions on Religious Grounds

This following article was written in 1993, but applies just as much today.

The local news is currently full of murders committed by youth involved in drugs, the Air India trial, and the killing of a Phillipino youth by Indo-Canadians. All of these people have religious affiliations.

From time to time it is necessary to take an objective look at what is going on in society. People all over the world are motivated by similar forces acting in their lives. Many people do good in the world, but many people also do bad things in the world. We take the good for granted, and are happy because good activities bring good results for all concerned. The bad activities, however, are decried by all people because of the bad consequences. When bad things are done in the name of religion, or by religious people, then the bad actions are viewed in much worse light, because it is not expected from them. Since society everywhere does not like bad things, it becomes necessary to understand the bad actions, and to try to find the path to a better life.

There have been wars by religious people throughout the ages. They consisted of subjugation, torture, murder, forced conversion, and people penalized by giving ransoms of money and property. In this short discussion I will relate only one or two incidents to make the point clear.

Several years ago there was a cruel murder performed in Vancouver. The television reporter mentioned that there was “bad blood” in the family on religious grounds. A twenty-two year old Muslim man married a twenty-three year old Hindu woman in Bombay, India. The man then brought his wife to live at his parent’s home in Vancouver. The couple had a daughter. For some reason, not yet known, the father-in-law allegedly suffocated his young daughter-in-law, and placed her body in the trunk of a car. This body was discovered later by police. This man is now in jail pending his trial for murder. He was denied bail. His son, and husband of the murdered woman, feels lost and distraught at what happened. He has moved out from his parent’s home, and his baby is in the care of public authorities. This was a wealthy family living in a prestigious area.

What can we say when one hears such news? Since there has been “bad blood” because of religion, it indicates that religion played a part in the lives of these people. And since such a drastic behaviour was perpetrated, it indicates that religious feelings ran high in them. This indicates that the person perpetrating the crime was a religious person. Can a person truly following the teachings of his religion, commit a murder?

Recently, in Mauritius there is a big problem with the illegal drug trade. I was surprised to hear that the biggest of these criminals are some high ranking Muslims (Maulvis) who, because of their religious office, are not subjected to searches as other people. While I was there, one such ‘holy man’ was sentenced to death. About the same time in Singapore there was news of an Indian engineer sentenced to death, also for illegal drug trade.

Many religious wars are going on currently. In the Sudan the minority black Christians and the majority black Muslims are at war. In the Middle East, Jews, Christians and Muslims are fighting. In Ireland the Catholics and Protestants are fighting. In India the Hindu and Muslims are fighting. In Iraq and Iran the Sunni and Shiite Muslims are fighting. What a sorry state of affairs the world is in?

In Canada, many priests have been charged and imprisoned for sexual assault of children. Historically, there have been religious inquisitions, hunting and killing of witches, forced conversions, and murder of saints and prophets. God is most likely very perplexed by observing the actions of ‘religious’ people in the world.

It is important to realize that popular religion is not the same as spirituality. Religions wear the cloak of fanaticism, bigotry, exclusivism and a host of external forms, rites, rituals, conventions and dogmas. The pure inner teachings given by the founders of religions have been eroded until only the shells remain. And shells are fit for the garbage dump. It is important not to build your spiritual home on the shaky foundation of popular religion. In propagating the shell, the soul is left in darkness, lost, and wandering in the uncharted shores of ignorance. Let all the people weep for the lost treasure of spirituality, and the resulting barbarism and inhumanity which have replaced it.

Can you truly say that religion is the basis for humanity and righteousness? From the observed condition of the world and its people, you cannot convince a rational person that it is. What should we do to free ourselves from the quagmire of religious entanglements? Seek the answer within yourself, in the quiet recesses of your own spiritual heart, humbly ask God to light the darkened path, and show you the straight way to His Kingdom.

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God, Religion, Goals and Observances

By Dr. J Das

In this life we are on a journey, and we have to learn the lessons of life. Just as we go to school to learn, we go to temples to learn. We read various scriptures, but we will learn only when our heart is in them. We cannot just read or listen and forget. We have to read, listen and understand, and then apply the lessons in our life. The following is an outline of the goals and observances throughout life.

There are four goals in life i.e. dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Going to the temple is a part of dharma. But we have to satisfy all four of these goals in life. Dharma is that process of life in which we live in accordance with nature i.e. the natural laws. We look after the health of the body, but we must also look after the health of the mind and spirit. We are the soul or atma. Atma comes from param-atma. Param means eternal. They are both Spirit, so the atma that we are is eternal. The soul is said to be sat-chit-anand – existence, consciousness and bliss. That is our true nature. But our true nature is covered with the veil of ignorance, which is called avidhya. Because of that, we are not seeing the reality of ourselves. All the satgurus, and great teachers of humanity, have taught us to know the real Self. It is called atma gyan, or we can say Brahm Gyan where Brahm is the Absolute. When we know that, we can say that we have moksha. Moksha is the last goal of life. Therefore in dharma we must live rightly in every aspect of life.

The second goal is artha. I think most people spend about 50% of their life in this category. Artha means wealth i.e. material things. And we know from experience that we are working to gather material things such as a house, a big bank account, fancy cars, all kinds of tasty foods etc. These are all earthly things. They satisfy our physical and mental being, but not

the spiritual. We are spiritual beings, and we have to satisfy that, so we have to put the proper emphasis on artha. We need to live, so we have to work, we have to have things, but we do not own anything. Kabir Saheb said: mutthi bandh ke aye jagat me, hath pasar ke jana hai (We came into the world with clenched fists, but we have to leave with hands outstretched). We are not going to take anything with us when we depart, so how can we say that anything is ours. We did not bring anything in the world. We met everything here. We must put a limit on this artha, although we need it, we must not get entangled. Things must not hold us. We must have the freedom to say yes or no, so we can have a balanced life – not only a materialistic life, but also a spiritual life.

The third goal of life is called kama. We all have desires. But we have to know our desires and whether they are worthwhile or not. Man mare na maya mare, mar mar jat sharir; asha trishna na mare, kahagaye das kabir (Kabir says that the mind, illusion, desires and longings do not die, even when the body approaches death). It is for us to understand that desires can control our life. Lord Buddha said that the main cause of suffering is desires. Because of desires we do all kinds of things, good and bad, to satisfy our senses. We want to see, hear and taste things, but we must have control over desires especially on a spiritual path. Kabir Saheb says: man ko mar gagan charhi jayi; mansarovar paith nahai. (We must subdue the mind and bathe in the lake of tranquility). When we can make our mind calm like the Mansarovar Lake, then we are able to go above the mind and become realized. As long as we are working with the mind, we will be trapped with sensual pleasures. So desires have a place, but they must be noble desires.

The last goal is moksha. What is moksha? Moksha is that state of our own awareness where we realize that we are not separate from God. In Sanskrit it is tat twam asi or aham brahm asmi. “Thou are that” or I am the eternal soul, the param tatva or Brahm, the Absolute. These are maha vakyas or great sayings. We have to experience that state and not just say it. And how do we experience that reality, that is tat. We have to control the mind, go above the mind, and get to the realm of the spirit. When we get to that region of the spirit, then we will see that all the worldly things are left behind. They are materialistic. The spirit, God, is not materialistic. All the matter comes from God, but God is spirit. The atma is spirit, so atma must realize God. The atma that we are is like water in a pot and the pot is in the water. Kabir Saheb said: jal men kumbh, kumbh men jal hain, bahar bhitari pani; phute kumbh jal jalahin samana, aisa gyan birle jani (Water is in the pot and the pot is in the ocean; break the pot and the waters merge. Scarcely do people realize this relationship between the soul and God). But only the pot seems to make the difference. This body is like that pot. Atma is there. Remove the idea of being the body and know that we are the atma. We will then go above the body consciousness, and merge into God-consciousness. We can then say aham brahm asmi or tat twam asi and know what we mean. That is the stage called moksha.

According to Patanjali’s yoga system there are yamas and niyamas to guide our life. The yamas are ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha. What do these mean? Ahimsa is non-violence towards any living being, not even to the trees, water or earth. We should not be violent in thought, word and deed. This is necessary since God’s presence (omnipresence) is in everything. If we want to be close to God, then we have to be non-violent in every thing we do in life. Satya is truth. Always be truthful to others and to ourselves. Be truthful to God. We cannot hide anything from God. He is omnipresent and omniscient, and knows everything. Truth must be in what we think, say and do. Kabir Saheb said: sanch barabar tap nahin, jhuth barabar

pap (There is no austerity greater than truth and no sin greater than untruth). Asteya means non-stealing, not taking anything not belonging to us. Kabir Saheb said: kar bahiyan bal apane, chhor birane as (We must earn our living honestly and not depend on others). God will always fulfill our needs in life. Brahmacharya is the fourth of the yamas, but the first of the four stages (ashrams) in life: brahmacharya, grihast, vanaprasth and sanyas. We must be pure in life and not go after sexual pleasures during student life. We need to control lust, anger, attachment, greed and egoism. We all have to learn, as we never know enough. Aparigraha is non-hoarding of things. Gandhiji said that if we take anything more than we need for our immediate use, we are stealing it from someone else. Take from the earth only according to our need, and from others only when they give, or what we earn. We all accumulate material things and we have to leave them and go. We feel trapped. We have to look after the car, the home, the bank account, the clothes, and we become entangled, and lose our freedom.

In the yoga system of Patanjali there are also the niyamas – shouch, santosh, tapa, swadhyaya, ishwarpranidhana. What do they mean? Shouch means cleanliness. It must be in thought, word and deed, in our home, kitchen, food, and environment. Santosh means contentment. jahi vidhi rakhe saheb, tahi vidhi rahiye (Live according to God's will). God knows what we need in life, but if we want to go beyond what should really be ours, how will we be happy? We may not be wealthy, but we must live within our means. Life is at such a fast pace in many countries, that people do not stop and enjoy the simplicity of life. Tapa means to endure some hardship in order to learn, practice and develop spiritually. A soft and pampered life will not produce spiritual growth. Swadhyaya means to study, learn, read the scriptures and other educational material, and analyze what they mean. We must apply the good teachings in our life. Ishwarpranidhana means a longing to realize God in this life. We want to be jivan mukt – liberation from avidya or ignorance, and its consequent bondage. We must have the knowledge that we are free. We cannot depend on faith and belief alone. Knowledge gives freedom, while ignorance gives bondage. We arrive at knowledge by using vivek or spiritual discrimination.

According to the Vedanta teaching, there are four means by which we can reach our spiritual goal in this life. They are vivek, vairagya, shatsampat and mumukshutva. What do they mean? They are guidance for our life. Vivek means to use our intelligence and spiritual discrimination, to know what is the atma, what is paramatma, and what is the reality? Is paramatma material or immaterial? We must use vivek to analyze and know that the soul cannot die, because it is spirit, it is not a material thing. What is Brahm, the Absolute? By using vivek we begin to understand the true nature of our reality. Vairagya means to practice detachment or renunciation, and not allow things to hold us. Use things that we have to, but do not be attached. We, and not the things, are the master. Shatsampat are six attributes we must cultivate. They are 1. Sama, or control of the mind and desires. 2. Dama, or control of the senses that seek fulfillment in objects. 3. Shraddha or faith and belief in the scriptural teachings, and in the guru. 4. Titiksha or undergoing some hardship and discipline to obtain spiritual benefits. Everything cannot be handed to us on a silver platter. We have to earn spiritual merits by our own effort. 5. Uparati or indifference in worldly matters, impartiality, and calmness. We cannot reach our spiritual goal if we long for material things. 6. Samadhana or proper concentration and meditation. We cannot go to God taking our body, but we can go to God through the spirit, through the atma. What God wants more than anything else, is for us to realize that we are the atma. That is true knowledge. Mumukshutva is to have a great longing for God. God must be in our heart all the time, so that whatever we do must be directed towards

getting the realization of God in our own being. It is just as when we are longing to buy a new car or new clothes, and we have to save up for it. Our mind is focused on getting the car or the clothes. Just so, we must want God without any strings attached. We cannot say to God, please give me a son and I will do a puja or religious ceremony, or O God, let me get a good job and I will perform yajnas (ceremonial offerings) in your name. We cannot bargain with God. God is not a businessman. God is that source of life, radiance, sustenance, and our being.

Further in the Vedanta teaching there are three steps to realization. They are shravan, Manan and Nididhyasan. Shravan means to listen to good teachings given by spirituality advanced people. We do not know everything, so we need to be humble and learn. Manan means to contemplate on the teachings. Allow the buddhi or intellect to examine the teachings until the meanings become clear. In this way we advance from the material world to the more refined, inner world, eventually attaining enlightenment. The material world is not the ultimate reality. Reality is that which is always existent and unchangeable. For example, satya is truth, and we cannot make truth false. What is truth, is truth. So we must try to hold on to the truth of our own true Self, and not the body that will die one day. The truth is eternal and we need to realize it. God is truth and truth is God. Nididhyasan is meditation that allows us to realize God in ourselves and in all beings – God’s omnipresence.

After considering the above teachings, it becomes clear that we must apply ourselves diligently, sincerely and humbly in order to make our lives meaningful and successful. Only then can we reach our spiritual goal.

What is the Value of Life?

By Dr. J. Das

What is the value of life? People do not often consider this question, because they take life for granted. We say that life has no price and it is beyond value, since no one can place a value on it. Religious people will say that life is a gift from God and is, thus, the greatest gift to anyone. But we all know that life is dear to every living creature. Every human wishes to preserve his life at any cost. Just so, every other living creature feels that its own life is very important, and needs to be preserved. The lowliest creature will try to avoid injury and to preserve its life. With life being so valuable, why do we pay so little attention to it and, so often, we relegate it to the back burners of our minds.

Observing the prevailing conditions in the world, we become aware of the fact that life is not perceived as very valuable or “equal”. It is often said that before God we are all equal, but people change that around to say that among ourselves we are not all equal. This “inequality” is based on our human perceptions, which are often based on expediency. We can look at the value of life from various angles:

(1) Perspective. From an individual perspective life is most valuable and every person will try to preserve his life. He is motivated by a will to live – a very strong will, indeed. From this individual perspective others are not as important, for they represent the “non-self”. In any struggle to survive, the individual will put himself first, even if others would lose their

lives. Perhaps, survival of the fittest is based on this individual perception, whether in man or animals. But in survival of the fittest, the fittest one does not pay attention to the value of life of the others.

Perhaps, we can take a spiritual perspective and see that life is the gift of God and very precious. As Dr. Albert Schweitzer would say: "Have reverence for life". When life is seen from a spiritual perspective, we wish to save the lives of other people, for we see them all as children of God. Thus there are many self-sacrificing people, who are working very hard to save other people from their suffering. The saints of the world have been able to see life from this spiritual perspective, and accept all life of the greatest value, and of equal importance in the cosmic order of things. Saints strive very hard to teach people the value of life and how to make life more meaningful and rewarding.

(2) Competitiveness. Competitiveness is widespread among people and animals. Competitiveness can be based on individuals or groups. An individual competes in as many ways as he finds possible, in order to preserve himself. In sports one team strives for success by defeating another team. In warfare soldiers on one side think of their lives as very valuable and will sacrifice the lives of the opposing soldiers. This sort of competitiveness can also be based on greed, for acquiring things at the expense of others. Competitiveness also occurs when there are large populations, often with scarce resources. People will compete in order to stay alive, and to protect themselves and their families, at the expense of other people and their families. The struggle for survival results in competitiveness.

(3) Mental aberrations. People with aberrant mentality often value themselves and de-value the lives of others. A tyrant will rule oppressively often sacrificing the lives of those who oppose him, or do not support his tyranny. There have been tyrants throughout history, and even currently in the world, who slaughter other people, in order to further their own ends.

(4) The Psychopath who will hurt others and kill without feeling any remorse or guilt. Yet he, himself, feels his own life to be very valuable. Perhaps, we can think of these people as murderers, rapists, child-molesters, etc.

(5) Criminals do not value the life of others as their own. They can thus commit murders, undertake illegal drug manufacture and sale at the expense of causing addictions and death of others. They murder others whom they feel will get them into trouble or owe them money.

(6) Depression is another factor which de-values life. The depressed person will often contemplate or perform suicide without much thought to the value of his life. He feels that life is not worth living.

(7) Helplessness. When people perceive themselves as helpless, then life does not hold much value. Take, for example, the droughts in Africa. Poverty and famine are rampant and people are dying by the thousands everyday. Parents, helplessly, watch their children die. While the helpless people suffer and die, the armies and gun bearers hijack food convoys trying to help the starving people. They value themselves greater than the poor helpless people, and thus take the food for themselves, or sell it on the black market for profit. Often the value of life is determined by the relative strength of powers. One power, or army, or person that is more

powerful, values itself more than its weaker counterpart. Similarly, the weak person or power will begin to de-value itself, because of a feeling of helplessness against a greater power.

Life is an immeasurable attribute or gift endowed with consciousness, intelligence, mind, emotions, senses, imaginations, will and judgement. All of these are intrinsic to life and are immeasurable. All have the same source, which is God, or the Supreme Being, or the Lord, or Cosmic Consciousness, or Brahman, or Cosmic Intelligence. Life itself is, thus, very valuable to all living beings. The only difference occurs in the degree of evolution of consciousness in various beings. If we are to live in harmony with nature, then we need to value all life and to have reverence for all life.

The Year of the Family

By Dr. J. Das

Let us try to understand something that is dear to the hearts of all of us, and that is the family.

A year is dedicated as the Year of the Family. We must try to understand what the family means. In some cultures the family means all the people who belong by blood relationship; in other cultures the family means only what is called the nuclear family i.e. mother, father and children. There is also the extended family that includes the nuclear family plus other members such as grand parents, uncles, aunts etc. But in modern society there is so much fragmentation of the family that we have single parent family, blended family, adoptive family and even separated family.

Why should we have to set aside one year and call it the “year of the family”? I think that is to recognize the fact that the family unit is a very important and essential one in the lives of all people. Were it not for family, then we will not have the love and respect and mutual support system that are built in into the family. Unfortunately, in our modern society, because of the fragmentation of the family, there is not the same built in support system, the same love, respect, caring and sharing any more. You all have heard the saying: “the family that prays together stays together”, but you can add any number of other variables. “The family that shares with each other stays together”, “the family that shares common ideals will stay together”, “the family that respects one another will stay together”, “the family that is supportive of one another will stay together”. Add many other qualifications like these, and you will realize the value of the family. And the importance of the family is not just to pray together, but also to do everything together. Express love for one another. Try to understand that God has created family, and the importance of the family, as all of you know, is to raise the young and to impart to the growing person certain values in life, and those values, when shared by the young people with the grown ups in the family, help to cement a strong family bond. But as the young person is growing up, if he does not adhere to the common family values, then there will be discordance, misunderstanding and fragmentation. Guru Kabir has said: jagra nitahi barayie, jagra buri balai; dukh upje chinta dahe, jagra me ghar jai (Always avoid quarrel for it is evil; it creates suffering and worries, and destroys the family). How beautifully Guru Kabir states the fact that we must always avoid misunderstanding and dissention. It is an evil force that can creep into a family. When that happens, only suffering ensues. And when there is quarrel and

misunderstanding, the whole house can be ruined. Now, none of us really want our homes to be ruined; we do not want our families to fall apart; but how can we prevent it when the prevailing modern forces acting upon our lives are so strong? Individuality wants self-expression. Our permissive society allows people to do whatever they want to do. When society begins to take this direction, then family disintegration is inevitable. Family disintegration is really a curse on society, because we lose the strength of the family. There is a saying that “united we stand and divided we fall”. If as a family we are all united, we can be strong, but if we have our own ideologies, and pursue our different ways as opposed to the ways that are common to the family, then there will be disintegration. So we must try to understand that as a family unit we must pull together and try to stay together, or else we will be facing a lot of dark consequences down the road. For the family year I have composed a poem I would like to share with you. It is called: “Year of the family”.

**The family, the backbone of society,
Has lost its pristine gaiety.
What was plain for all to see,
Is now observed by political decree.
How far have we wandered,
From family beauty now squandered?
The good old days of family unity are gone,
And families now scatter hither and yon.
Dignified love and respect was the rule,
But now they are almost topics of ridicule.
Each now vies for his own rights,
Causing squabbles and family fights.
The beckoning call of modernity,
With sensual pleasures aplenty,
Lure the fickle mind with gratification,
But earns sorrow and dissatisfaction.
Strong family bonds are a treasure,
Where each is loved in equal measure.
May the year of the family,
Strengthen all families equally,
And allow God’s divinity to manifest,
Making each family truly blessed.**

Those were my thoughts as I was thinking of the year of the family. Does our family include only the few members that are living in a household? Don’t we have a human family? Just as we are taught to love our family, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, we are also taught by Sat Guru Kabir to love everybody. He says: sab se hiliye, sab se miliye, sab ko lije nam (be cordial and friendly with all people, and call their names). That is the way human beings are supposed to behave because we have an instinct within us that tells us love is important. The saying has been coined: “where love is God is”! It is also said that “God is Love and Love is God”! Let us try to understand that there is no greater force in the world than love. If we truly loved, we will feel happiness in our own hearts; we will feel happy knowing that we can share our lives with one another in the family. We are not going to be selfish, because selfishness will not be there. The family is stronger than its individual members. If one of you want to fight an enemy you may not succeed, but if the whole family fights an enemy,

that family is likely to succeed. There is a very interesting story given by an old person who was about to die, and he wanted to show his seven sons how unity is important. He asked each son to bring a piece of stick. He then asked each one to break his stick, and each did so. He then told them to tie all of the seven sticks together in one bundle. The father then asked each son to break this bundle, and none of them could break it because there are seven sticks. By that he showed them the strength of unity in facing any adversity. Each may face defeat and humiliation, but if they acted together, they will have strength, power, self-esteem, prestige and respect. What is more important than these qualities that a family can share? Basically, God created man and woman to procreate, but that is not the whole function of human beings, just to make more people. The function of human beings is to express love for one another. It is to recognize God as the source of all of us, and to recognize that God is the same for all beings, for all people. We cannot divide God; neither should we divide ourselves and create artificial barriers and divisions. Guru Kabir has taught one essential truth that we are all one family called humanity. We are not “different families” identified by different family names, traditions, and cultures. If we divide ourselves according to certain clans, rules, and traditions, then we are causing separations between one another, and in separations lie weakness, defeat and sorrow. In unity we see all of us as brothers and sisters. We are all one before God. No matter how we try to separate ourselves we cannot really be separated, because we all belong to the human race. But we have cunning minds which tell us we are either superior or inferior, or we feel rejection, or are too proud or our different values. This kind of attitude is prevalent, and so we do not have a common denominator that can strengthen all of us as belonging to one family. We can say we are a “religious family”, because we belong to a certain religion or a certain church, or we follow certain dogmas or doctrines. Or we can say we are an “economic family” because we are all in the same occupation, or we have a certain degree of wealth. Or if we are teachers, we can say we are all a “family of teachers”. Priests we can say they are all in the same “family of God” spreading the word of God. So what does the word “family” really mean? As we are to observe the “year of the family”, does it just mean we try to cement a bond with our immediate family, of mother, father, and children? I think we will be very narrow minded and short sighted if we limit family only to the nuclear family. We must extend ourselves to include the “extended family” but beyond that, we extend ourselves to include our society, our whole community, as our family, because the common denominator is that we are all human beings, and should not hold things against one another. We should not take to task other people because of certain values or traditions they follow. Let them be what they are, but let us have acceptance and mutual respect. Human beings are bound to vary according to their own actions, their temperament, their geographical location, and their cultures, but that does not defeat the fact that we are all human beings and, as human beings, we share certain things in common. We all need food, shelter, clothing, love, respect, and self esteem. Why don't we ‘give’ these things to one another? We know that by doing so, happiness will abound. If we love, we get love in return. If we hate, we get hate in return. We know from common experience that what is hateful, what brings suffering such as anger, revenge, and hurt feelings, cause suffering for us and for others. We know instinctively that we want love, compassion, understanding, respect, and self-esteem. Let us accord this to one another. Let us truly be human beings so that when we are celebrating the year of the family, we truly understand what the family means. It means to be united, and to hold certain values that are dear to all of us. Certain values are held to be common, and they are called “inalienable rights” by the government, such as the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; freedom of worship and freedom of expression. But we are not

really a government when we are talking about the spirit. The spirit is the same in all of us, and it cannot stand separations. If we accept that God dwells in the hearts of all beings, for God is life, then we cannot truly be separate. So we rise above the political definition of rights, and go to the spiritual, the metaphysical, rights that we have as human beings, with God as our parent, and we as brothers and sisters. This makes one big family called humanity, and Satguru Kabir has taught us this. Let us therefore try to abide by this exalted definition of the family. Be friendly and loving towards all people, and never criticize other people for what they are, because what they are is dependent upon what they are thinking, saying and doing. For the thought is the father of the action, and the action is the father of the character. According to what you sow, that is what you will reap, and no one can escape that. So let us sow good seeds of family strength, family unity, family love, family coherence, family sharing, and family self-esteem. These are the things that will make us happy and will keep us together. So when we say “the family that prays together stays together” let us add all the other things that can be with us if we stick together as a family, for in unity as a family we have strength, but in fragmentation we can have only weakness. Let us then strengthen our families, and let the year of the family become one in which all of us strengthen ourselves in a spiritual bond which nobody can break. If we are all bound together spiritually, and have that strength of God given to us, and we unite ourselves, we will also be strong, and that strength will give us meaning in life, solidarity, brotherhood and all the other great qualities we want to achieve. So dear brothers, sisters and children, let us resolve to remain as family. Let us share in family ideals and goals, trials, tribulations and sorrows. We will add to our strength, and will be able to support one another into the future of this spiritual life.

Sahaj Yoga

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When we are talking about Sahaj Yoga there are two words – Sahaj and Yoga. The definition of Yoga given by Bhagwan Patanjali is very nice: Yogashchit vritti nirodha. That is a very good aphorism. When he says Yogashchit vritti nirodha he means that control over thought waves is yoga. When I am speaking about Sahaj Yoga, I would like to go deeper than thoughts. What is deeper than thoughts? In reality, emotions are deeper than thoughts. You can think of many things. You can think that you do not want to be angry, but your emotions will compel you to be angry, because the emotions are always stronger than thoughts. Thus if somebody wants to do Sahaj Yoga the first thing that person should have is purity of emotions. I am not talking about purity of thoughts because that is on the surface. Emotion is deep seated, so the purity of emotions is very important. How can one achieve purity of emotions? There are many things to do, but there are four aspects I will like to talk about. The first is an attitude of friendliness. The second is compassion. The third is cheerfulness, and the fourth is gratitude. In this world, generally, people have developed qualities opposite to these. Thus instead of friendliness we see hatred and enmity. With these there cannot be peace or joy. One who is friendly towards all, hating no one is indeed a great person. All the saints were friendly towards every living being.

We have the examples from the lives of the saints. A saint was once bathing in a river and he saw a scorpion floating and thought that it will drown. So due to compassion, he took the

scorpion on his palm and tried to save it. The scorpion stung him because it was its nature, and it fell back into the water. The saint again lifted it and the scorpion stung him again. The saint lifted it a third time, and somebody on the shore saw what was happening. The man asked the saint why he was doing it when the scorpion was stinging him repeatedly. The saint said: "I cannot give it up because it will die". The man said: "But that scorpion stings you". Then the saint said: "If the scorpion cannot give up its own nature of stinging, why should I give up my nature of compassion, of protecting life"? This illustrates the friendliness of the saint towards every living being. If friendliness is in your hearts, and if it becomes your nature, then you will find that you will be saintly. You will spread friendliness wherever you go. So friendliness is the first aspect of purifying the emotions. If you have enmity towards anybody, then your emotions will not be pure. Generally, we see that there is in the world more hatred than love. That is why there is war. War is going on between India and Pakistan, NATO is bombing Yugoslavia, and there are wars in South Africa, Congo and other African countries, and more recently with the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because of hatred, there is no peace. If people will truly know the value and power of peace and love, then the world will be more enjoyable.

We have seen that people develop power through enmity and anger. Anger creates power and a person with anger can do many harmful things. Hitler did it. He said that if you want to have power, you should create enemies and if there are none, then you should imagine enemies. That is why he told the people that all the Jews were enemies. This gave him the power and he wanted to conquer the world. But the power that comes from hatred is never good; the power which comes from love is great and can benefit everyone. At birth a baby has fear because of unfamiliar conditions and environment. In the womb it felt safe and the mother supplied all its needs. You may have heard the phrase, *bhy bina hote na preet* (without fear you cannot have love) but that is not true. With fear there can never be love as whatever you do will be by compulsion, and not from your heart. There will be no love. When love develops inside, then that is the great moment in your life. Therefore, saints of India, sages and rishis explained that there is difference between love and passion. Love always develops from inside, but passion will always need an outside source. Anger never comes from inside; it will always need an outside source. Hatred never comes from inside; it will always need an outside source. So all the opposite qualities of friendliness come from outside. What comes from inside is spontaneous. That is Sahaj. When you depend on outside things, they are not really spontaneous. So when we are talking about this Sahaj Yoga, the Sahaj in itself has to be spontaneous. We must thus develop friendliness of character. It is easy to develop enmity, but it is hard to develop friendliness.

One day a person came to see Saint Rabia, a Muslim saint, and she used to read the Koran everyday. One day she came across a line that said love God and hate Satan. She took a pencil and scratched the words that said 'hate Satan'. One day a saint, Hassan, visited her, and was reading the Koran. He asked Rabia why hate Satan was scratched. No one has this power to spoil the Koran. Who is higher than Digambar, the messenger Mohammed? Rabia said that she did it. So the Fakir said, "I thought you were a saint and you scratched the words from the Koran". Then Rabia said yes, "I scratched it". She said, "My heart is so full of love, there is no space for hatred, so from where shall I bring hatred for Satan"? When there is love hatred cannot enter, because hatred comes from outside and the love comes from inside. You don't need anything to develop love, but when someone says, "I love you", he is begging to hear "I love you too". When you beg for love you will never get love. You may call your child, and say, "Give me a hug then I will give you chocolate". You are begging for love, and you will never get real love. When

there is love in your heart you will share it, you will just give it, you will never beg because the begging does not come on the path of love. That is why I said that emotions are greater than thoughts. When you are friendly with everybody, you will have no enemy, and you will develop detached love. That is why Guru Kabir said that he was seeking the welfare of everyone. All saints have explained this type of love.

The next quality is compassion. Compassion is the hallmark of the saints. Read the stories of their character: Compassion of Mahavir, compassion of Buddha, compassion of Guru Kabir and others. When you have compassion you will like to improve the world. You will like to help someone else who is in trouble, who is in pain. Have you ever seen any child who is crying on the street and you go and wipe his tears. If you can do that you are following the path of compassion. And because of compassion, a person becomes a saint. When Christ was crucified he said, "O God, forgive these people for they know not what they do". He said more than that. He said, "O God, please forgive me, for saying to forgive these people. O God, these people are very good really, and what they are doing is removing the distance between you and me. So I am very grateful to them". And when that kind of knowledge is there, that is really compassion, which also comes from the inside. Think of Mahavir. People tortured him, threw stones on him, and nailed his ears, but he did not say anything against them. He had only compassion for them, as that was his nature. His nature was just like that of a tree. You throw stones on the tree laden with fruit, it will return fruits. He was vivasht -unable to do what other people can do. He could not return their cruelty, because he had no hatred. There was a saint Al Hallaj Mansur. There is no saint in the world who was tortured like him. The king did not want him to live on his land, and also he wanted to kill him. First he ordered that people should throw stones on him. Everyone threw stones on him as he walked down the street. His gurubhai (spiritual brother), Junaid, knew that Mansur was not wrong, but if he did not throw something, then the king will punish him. So instead of throwing a stone he threw a flower, and Mansur cried out in pain saying that the stones did not hurt him, but the flower did, as it was thrown by one who loved him, whereas the others knew no better. Mansur's skin was peeled off, his hands and legs were cut. His eyes were dug out, and ultimately he was put on a pointed iron that pierced his body. At that time he said, "O Lord, I know that these people cannot take away love from me. This king cannot take this love from me, and I know that You are here. I have love for You and I am coming to see You now. And I know that you are coming to me". He said that the pointed iron was the staircase to enter into his Father's kingdom. He had no hatred. He was full of love and compassion.

Now comes the third quality which is cheerfulness. Cheerfulness is very important in order to have pure emotions. When your emotions are pure then you will be cheerful. When your emotions are impure you will never be cheerful, even if you try. But it is better to be cheerful. A man in Bombay had a gloomy face, so when he took over his father's business he started to lose business because his face was always gloomy, never laughing. People did not want to talk to him. Then somebody told him that he should learn to smile to improve his business. But the man said that his face was like that – and he could not smile? Then his friend advised him to get plastic surgery to make a smiling face. He liked the idea and had the plastic surgery, and his face was now smiling all the time. Now his business started to grow and he became a rich person. Whether people bought or not, he was smiling, and people liked his smiling attitude. One day he got a telegram from the village that his mother passed away. He went to see his mother and everybody was standing around his mother's dead body and was crying, and he was smiling.

Everybody was asking why he was smiling? He said, “I am crying”. They said that he did not look like he was crying, but smiling. They did not like his smiling at such a time and they threw him out. You should know where you have to smile. You cannot laugh at a person who is falling down. If you laugh at that person it means that you don’t have compassion. You need to know where to be cheerful by using your discretion.

Cheerfulness is very important. Some saints explain that you have to live in this world with happiness and spread happiness all over. There was a saint in India who was always joyful. Whoever came in contact with him experienced that joy. He said that nobody should have a gloomy face. Have cheerfulness, have joy, rejoice in the world. He had many followers. They loved him very much because he was always full of joy which he shared. A time came when he was about to die. Three days before, he called all his disciples and told them that he was going to leave this body and that they must not cry. Make his death jubilant, enjoy it, and celebrate it. For three days he told many jokes, and made the people laugh heartily. On the final day he called them and said: “When you place me on the funeral pyre, do not remove my clothes, and do not bathe me. Just place my body on the funeral pyre. They obeyed his instructions, but they were feeling sad. When the fire ignited, fireworks were displayed. He had worn a long coat with many pockets in which he had hidden many firecrackers. The people were surprised and marveled at the display, and they all laughed. Even in death this saint made people cheerful. All saints do not want people to be unhappy. They themselves endured suffering with equanimity, and have taught others to accept adversity with cheerfulness.

The last quality to develop is gratitude. Can you imagine how you would feel if someone is ungrateful to you when you have done something good for him? Gratitude encourages people to be helpful towards others. When someone is ungrateful you do not feel like doing anything for him. But gratitude should go way back to God for giving you the gift of life and the air, water, sunshine and food that grows by His power. Next you should be grateful to parents who brought you into the world and loved and nurtured you. You need to be grateful to teachers who are the means for you to get knowledge. Similarly you need to be grateful to the government, the police force, the civil authorities that take care of various needs of society, and also to anyone who shares your sorrows, or has words of wisdom for you. To be grateful requires the giving up of ego, pride and vanity. Develop humility, and gratitude will become natural to you.

Once you develop the above qualities, and make them a natural part of your personality, and sense the presence of God in your heart, and in the hearts of all beings, then Sahaj yoga is your natural accomplishment. Peace, contentment and happiness will be your rewards.

The Relevance of Kabir Saheb’s Teachings

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The relevance of a certain fact depends on its utility at any given time, but he who has his inner eyes opened reveals the Truth for all time, and that Truth remains relevant always because Truth is eternal. It never changes. The message from a true saint is for every age. The land of India produced such a saint named Kabir. The beauty of India is that she has so many things to give to the world. That is why Max Muller wrote: “If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow in some part a very paradise on earth – I should point to India. If I were to ask under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant – I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans and one of the Semetic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India.”

The main reason why Max Muller described the dignity of India in such poetic words is that the teachings for humanity by the great souls, saints and sages, were always for all humanity and not for a particular class or race. The true religion which they taught was humanity, not Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism. That is why when someone asked Kabir Saheb about his religion, whether he was Hindu or Moslem, he replied:

**hindu kahu tu hun nahi, musalman bhi nahi.
panch tattwa ka putala, gaibi khele mahi.**

“If I say I’m Hindu, I am not, and also I am not Moslem. The body is made up of five gross elements and the Divine Being who is dwelling in it is ‘I am.’”

He named only two religions, but the same holds for all religions. He taught that humanity is above all religions, or we can say that his view was that humanity is the only religion. He said that God is the father of all. Why do we have to fight then if we are all brothers?

He said:

**awwal allah nur upaya, kudrat ke sab bande.
ek nur se sab jag upaja, kaun bhale ko mande.**

“God is only one and all are his children, because they all come from the same Light. So all are the same; who then is good or bad.”

Nowadays everybody talks about peace, but peace can come only with tolerance, with humanity, not by fighting. People sometimes say that God is one but has many names, but they do not accept it in their hearts. To live in the multi-cultural and multi-religious world we have to understand what Kabir has said about God and his names.

**bhai re dou jagadish kahan se aye, kahu kaune bauraya.
allah ram karima kesho hari hajart nam dharaya.**

“O brother, tell me from where two gods came? Who made you mad? Allah, Ram, Karima, Kesho, Hari, Hajart are all names of the same God”.

ram rahima ekai hai re, kahe karo larai.

“Don’t fight, Brother! Ram and Rahim are one”.

Also he said:

ko hindu ko turk kahawai, ek jani pe rahiye.

“Who is Hindu or who is Muslim? All have to live on the same earth”.

hindu kahe mohi ram piyara, turuk kahe rahimana.

apas me dou lari lari muye, maram na kahu jana.

“Hindu says that Ram is dear to him, and the Muslim says its Rahiman. Both fight between themselves and die, and do not know the secret.”

This one of his teachings is very relevant to our time and also forever. Fighting in the name of religion is not accepted. He showed the path of love and harmony. He was also opposed to dividing people by caste and creed. He said:

ek bunda se shrishti rachi hai, ko brahman ko sudra

“All are from the same Source then who is Brahmin and who is Shudra.”

All these teachings are relevant now more than ever because of intolerance of religions, castes and creeds. The relevance of his teachings is that he has given hope to the common people for God realization. He taught that God is dwelling in you – in your own heart. It is not necessary to go to the forest to do austerity to realize God. If you will clean your heart, you can realize God within yourself. He emphasized the fact that every person must have to be of good morals and good character. He said that there is no greater person than one having good character.

silwant sabase bada, sab ratno ki khan.

tin lok ki sampada, rahi sil men an.

“A person of excellent character is great. He is the mine of all jewels. The wealth of all three worlds is in good character”. Here character is not merely morality, but also modesty and chastity, and also the best behaviour throughout life. Character is said to be the most valuable of all things. A famous proverb says:

“If wealth is lost nothing is lost. If health is lost something is lost. But if character is lost everything is lost.”

It tells us the importance of character. That is why Kabir Saheb’s teaching on character is valuable for the world. It has also been said: “Sow a desire and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap character; sow a character and reap a destiny.”

His message is also very relevant for the world today which is facing a dreadful disease called AIDS. As we know, the most important reason for the spread of AIDS is illicit sex, or sexual affairs with many partners or homosexuals. Kabir Saheb had mentioned the danger of illicit sex. He said:

parnari paini chhuri, mati koyi karo prasang.

ravan ke das sis gaye, parnari ke sang.

“Don’t be involved in illicit sex with the other ladies except your wife. Illicit sex inflicts wounds as a sharp and pointed knife. Even a powerful person like Ravan, who had ten heads (he had the strength of intellect of ten persons) lost his heads when he became involved with another woman.”

He also mentioned that those people who are involved in illicit sex hide it from society, but after a few days it shows its effects, and then both partners of that act destroy themselves.

**parnari rata phiri, chori bidhata khahi
divas chari sarasa rahi, anti samula jahi.**

“Those who are involved in illegal sex with others’ wives or husbands eat stolen fruits. They enjoy pleasure for four days but at last destroy themselves rapidly with shame”.

We know that illicit sex is not only harmful for society but also for those who are involved in it. If people would stop changing their sexual partners, then many of the moral problems of the world will be solved easily. I think that if one man and one woman live together for their whole life then there will be no fear of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS. It will also solve the problem of divorce. Breaking up of marriages is increasing rapidly in the world. In the United States over fifty percent of marriages end in divorce causing fragmented families and social problems. If the man and wife live with love and be faithful to each other, their life will be full of joy and peace.

Kabir Saheb said much about the dignity of a faithful lady.

**pativrata ko sukh ghana, jako pati hai ek.
man maili bibhicharini, take khasam anek.
kabir kalijug aye ke, kiye bahut jo meet.
jin dil bandhi ek su, te sukh sowai nischint.**

“Pativrata – the lady who is chaste and faithful to her husband – lives in happiness with only one best friend, her husband. But the woman whose mind is full of rubbish, that wanton woman who has many friends, cannot live happily.”

“In this Kaliyug she who keeps many illegal friends cannot be happy. But she whose heart is full of love for only her husband, sleeps without worries”.

The same thing applies to the husband also. We can see that in this “modern society” the teachings of Kabir Saheb is most essential for maintaining love, peace, brotherhood, fidelity etc., and for the removal of many religious, social and personal evils which rob people of their happiness. His teachings are most essential also for those who earnestly wish to grow spiritually.

Blessings to all for life improvement.

Kabir Association of Canada.

Peer Pressure, Adolescents and Drug Use

By Angella Arjune Kaied
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Introduction:

What is Peer Pressure?

- Teenagers seem to have more of a problem with peer pressure because they are just beginning to learn about who they are, and what their belief systems are. They can be easily swayed, especially if they have a strong desire to fit into certain groups, and they are becoming more and more self-reliant. (Dr. Bruce A. Epstein, author of “The Importance of Peer Pressure”)
- Dictionary Definition: peer pressure is the pressure from one’s peers to behave in a manner similar or acceptable to them.
- Normal part of growing up and everyone faces some sort of social pressure on a daily basis.

Adults feel the pressure to socialize with certain people, or to attend certain functions. Pre-school aged children are assessed on how they interact with their peers, and adolescents are similarly judged. “A healthy part of every child’s development is involvement with their peers. This is especially true during adolescence, as teenagers develop a sense of independence from their parents.”

Is Peer Pressure Always a Bad Thing?

- Peer pressure can be both a positive and negative experience.
- Positive peer pressure can motivate teenagers to excel in certain areas like sports, and influence some to take positive action to help others, the environment, etc.
- Positive peer pressure is the backbone of most cheering sections.
- Negative peer pressure is when the teenagers are influenced to partake in deviant behavior, that is not in one’s character, nor is it morally sound, and it puts them at a risk for experiencing a negative outcomes.

Socialization and Peer Pressure:

- Human beings are social creatures.
- We have very few basic instincts to help us survive in the world.
- We learn almost everything from others such as parents, peers, and teachers.
- One survival instinct we do have that seems to be inborn is the fear of rejection.
- This fear leads us to conform to the group so that we can fit in, and have a group to protect us from harm.
- During adolescents the need to belong to a certain group is very strong.
- Isolation and social rejection during adolescence can lead to serious behavioral problems and communication difficulties.
- Teenagers will do a lot of different things to become a member of certain groups.

- Some of those things could be simply changing their appearances, wearing the acceptable brand name shoes, or to more seriously engaging in behavior that is out of one's character, such as drug use, risky behaviors like street car racing, etc.

When Peer Pressure Leads to Drug Use:

- Peer pressure is one of three major influences on teenagers and drug use.
- The other two are the existence of a drug-prone personality (someone who is interested in drugs on their own, and enjoy the feeling the drugs give them, or a person who is easily addicted to lots of different things) and an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship.
- Some teenagers try alcohol because their friends are drinking. Some start to smoke because its what the cool kids are doing
- Most teenagers will resort back to their own ideas about smoking and drinking

Substance Use Patterns of Canadian Youth:

- Most commonly used substances are alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis.
- Increase in cannabis use throughout the 1990s has been reported in all provinces.
- Ecstasy use had increased eight-fold in Ontario students between 1993 and 1999.
- Since early 1990s there has been an increase in the percentage of students reporting current use of more than one substance at a time, including illicit drugs.
- Some provinces reported an increase in the percentage of students who engage in heavy drinking episodes, five drinks or more per occasion.
- School drop-outs, or those at risk of leaving school, are at a higher risk for substance abuse, or are already regular or heavy users.
- Young males are more likely than young females to engage in riskier forms of substance abuse.

Not all of the drug abuse going on amongst teenagers is due to peer pressure, however peers can and will influence some teenagers to engage in inappropriate behavior.

How Can We Help Our Teens Resist Peer Pressure?

Judy Halassy is a Youth Social Worker who has a few suggestions on how to raise such a teen.

SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR KIDS

- Teens would naturally want to spend time with their friends.
- But as a parent, make it a priority to spend time with your kids.
- Go to their soccer games, their recitals, etc.
- Get interested and involved in their lives.

PRACTICE GOOD COMMUNICATION

- Listen, listen, listen and hear what they are saying.
- Don't try to force your own viewpoints on them, let them share their ideas with you.

RESPECT

- As teens share their ideas and thoughts, don't ridicule them or say how immature their thinking is.

CULTIVATE SELF-AWARENESS

- Help them explore their feelings about certain issues,

- This will build their confidence on certain topics and it will help them be strong when confronted.

SET BOUNDARIES

- Positive discipline and setting limits give children a sense of security.
- Consequences and rules need to be consistent

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Let your child take responsibility for his/her actions
- If they get in trouble at school, don't go and defend their actions, let them realize what they did was wrong, and they need to be accountable for it.

GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT

PRAISE WHEN PRAISE IS APPROPRIATE

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS

- Nurture interests and hobbies, the more things they're interested in and are good at the less likely they will get into trouble.

TRUST

HUMOUR

TIME FOR YOURSELF

THREE A's OF SELF-ESTEEM

- Affection
- Acceptance
- Accomplishment

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Divisions, Intolerance and Violence

Important Causes

By Dr. J. Das

Divisions, intolerance and violence in this wonderfully beautiful and complex world are rampant. God has supplied us with all the basic necessities of life. The most important necessities are sunshine, air, water, food, sleep and activity. These are all free-of-charge, except for food and, even then, it is not likely a very expensive item, except for very poor people. Since God has given so abundantly for the maintenance of life, why are there so much enmity, divisions, intolerance and violence perpetrated by man against man? As human beings, we get wrapped up in our day to day activities, and we lose the vision of the whole of humanity, and the forces, which drive it. Let us stand back, as it were, and take an overall view of the world of people. You will notice that people are of different races – Caucasian, Mongoloid, Negroid,

Aboriginals and Eskimos. We can say that these are natural or God given characteristics and we cannot really do anything about the race in which we are born. We can then look at colour. People are white, black, brown, yellow and red. These are only broad outlines of colour, for there are variations, and sometimes one colour blends into the other. The white, black and brown people are easily distinguishable. The yellow, so called, are some of the Oriental or Mongoloid people. The red refers mostly to the Red Indians native to the Americas. We can also say that the colour into which we are born is natural and God given. We cannot do much about altering the colour in which we are born.

The next obvious division is castes. In India the castes are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and various clans equivalent to tribes in other cultures. On close examination, it will be found that the castes are not natural, or God-created. People created these as they have crated guilds, tribes, clubs, gangs and classes.

The next big division of humanity occurs in culture. Culture is expressed through language, customs, clothing, food and art forms. There are hundreds of languages in the world and thousands of dialects. Customs in the whole world are too numerous to mention. Clothing styles vary from country to country, and climate to climate. Food is also different in various cultures. Similarly, art forms such as architecture, music, dance and various types of festivals vary among people. Again, we can say that these are not natural, or God given. People create culture, and those belonging to one culture tend to adhere to that culture tenaciously, at the exclusion of other cultures.

There is another big division of humanity based on religion. There are various religions in the world. Religions depend on scripture, priesthood, doctrines, rituals, belief systems etc. A close examination will show that all of these were created by people, and not by God. If God had created religion, then there will not be so many differences in scripture, in priest craft, in doctrines, in rituals and beliefs, etc.

The next big division in humanity is status. Status is somewhat equivalent to the caste system, and occurs in all societies. Status is expressed in terms of social standing, education, wealth, conferred status and power. People of one social class do not easily mix with another, because they form various strata or layers in society. The higher social classes, because of their high income, profession or educational levels, do not easily mix with people who are considered to be of lower social status. Similarly, the wealthy do not mix with the poor; those who have gained power and prestige will often oppress those who are considered to be weak or submissive. A close examination will show that status is artificial, and created by people, and not by God.

The next big division occurs in politics. Various countries in the world have various forms of political systems. There is Democracy, which is based on the party system, and democracy can either be with a monarch or a republican system. Even in democracy, one party may not get along with the other party because each puts forward its own views about how to govern a country. Then there is socialism, communism, dictatorship, theocracy and various other forms of governments. Democratic governments do not accept the socialist, or communist, or dictatorship types of governments. These systems appear to be mutually exclusive. Communism, as a system of government, has not proved itself in the world, and there is collapse of communism currently, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Dictatorships also cannot stand any opposition,

and exist by virtue of one person having absolute power, and keeping the rest of the population in some degree of subjection. Dictators are often self-serving, in terms of obtaining fame or satisfying their egos, as in megalomania. Many dictators in the world have brought immense suffering to their people. In the end, they are often assassinated, or they have to seek refuge in some other country. Theocracy means a government ruled by a religious figure. If the religious leader assumes absolute power, based on the authority given by God (assumed to be so by the Theocrat), then he can cause immense suffering to the people. In the name of purging the religion of so called evils, he may execute all of those opposed to him, or who seek a more liberal view towards God and life in general.

All of the above divisions express themselves through large groups of people, and not individuals. The Caucasian race is in the hundreds of millions, and includes the white and the brown people. The Mongoloid race is also hundreds of millions, and are those distinguished by certain facial features – slit-like eyes and flattened and widened nasal bridge. The Negroid is distinguished mostly by his dark complexion and the negroid hair. Aboriginals are the native inhabitants of various countries, and the Eskimos are the people who live in the frozen arctic regions. All of these involve large numbers of people, and they cannot do anything about their race. Similarly, people of the various colors are in large numbers all over the world. They also cannot do anything about their colour. Inter-marriage may bring about certain changes in the skin colour, or features, but this is not guaranteed, as certain characteristics will repeat themselves, depending on the dominance of the genes involved.

Apart from race and colour, all the other divisions are man-made, and having been made, people identify themselves with them, and fight with those who are of a different group. In the caste system, the high caste people avoid those of low caste. The evil is that the caste system appears to be conferred by birth, and not dependent on deeds. Culture, similarly, must of necessity, be different in different countries, because languages are different, and so are climatic conditions and divisions through geography.

Religion is also of various kinds. People belonging to one religion do not generally accept people of other religions as their equals. Each religion tends to think that it has a monopoly on the Truth and on God. But people who think like this are truly misled. What interest does God have in what type of doctrines or rituals people practice. God will certainly be ‘confused’ if He were to keep track of all the rituals, doctrines, belief systems and scriptures abounding in the world. Many religious practices are not very important for enlightenment, and are based on blind belief or traditions, which, when properly examined, will be found to be without any firm foundation. To quarrel in the name of religion is to deny the supremacy of God who exists in the hearts of all. What does God care about peoples’ various expressions of status? God is not interested in status symbols. These serve only to boost the ego, and to remove one further from God. Does God really care about politics, and to which form of government or party you owe your allegiance? People, having made all these artificial differences, adhere to them at the exclusion of others. They then fight amongst themselves, and develop enmity and intolerance, often leading to violence. If we can think for a moment that God is looking at what people are doing all over the world, according to these various artificial divisions, I am sure that He will not admit to being a part of any of them.

The above groupings dealt mostly with large numbers of people. However, in every individual there are certain characteristics that cause intolerance and violence. These are ego, anger, pride, greed, prejudice, etc. People express these in various degrees in any one or more of the above divisions. There can be good or bad Caucasians or religionists. There can be violent democrats and peace loving Shudras. There can be greedy people of high social status, and compassionate and altruistic people belonging to a minority culture. These individual characteristics express themselves in various combinations and permutations among the various divisions mentioned above.

What is the solution to the problems based on all these divisions? The solution lies in acceptance of one another as belonging to the human race; thus the most important religion becomes Humanity. The most important race is Humanity. The most important caste is Humanity. The most important colour is Humanity, and so it is with culture, status, politics or any other divisions, which can be created. God, in His wisdom, made people in certain races and colors. Mankind created all the rest. God also made only male and female throughout the whole world. Let us as children of God accept one another with love, acceptance, and respect. God would not like us to do any less.