

## RELIGIONS IN ASIA AND PURSUIT OF PEACE

Hello Friends

Warm greetings to you all

We know that Asia is the birthplace of all the major religions of our world and they have been coexisting for thousands of years. Though they seem different in their practice, there are similarities at core, as all the religions aim to bring their followers close to the ultimate reality – God.

Let us look at some significant similarities.

1. God, the supreme and complete being, known by whatever name, form or attribute, forms the central theme of every religion. Some religions do not believe in any form, but only in divine spirit. But no religion exists without concept of God.
2. All religions prescribe moral way of life and try to develop goodness in human beings.
3. Though they may differ in their concept and method, every religion teaches to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, heaven and hell and expects human beings to choose the better option to follow in life.
4. All of the religions have their own scriptures, either written or oral and hold their scriptures to be holy as a word of God. The scriptures prescribe a way of life that would lead to liberation and God.
5. Liberation and union with God is considered ultimate aim of human life by all religions.
6. Almost all religions believe in the concept of descent of the Divine in a human form, either as God incarnate or a Prophet or a Messenger. He comes to demonstrate the way of life that man may follow and ascend to His level.
7. All religions have their places of worship, places considered sacred, where the rituals are performed and offerings are made to God for seeking His Blessings.
8. Prayer is an integral part of every religion.
9. Reward for good deeds and punishment for wrong deeds is stipulated.
10. All religions suggest pilgrimage for internal purification.
11. Ethics and morality based actions are materially as well as spiritually rewarding as per all religions.
12. Charity is encouraged by all religions.

Despite so many similarities, diversity becomes prominent and leads to clashes in the followers of religions.

Evidently, every ideology, whether religious, political or socio-economic, howsoever noble when first conceived, invariably gets degenerated into rigid dogmas and becomes potentially dangerous to peace.

Uncontrolled ambition and lust for power of the leaders and insatiable craving of material wealth, spoil and corrupt the pious atmosphere of religion and the socio economic structure of a nation.

In such a situation we see crises all around the society;

- crisis of honesty in economics and commerce
- crisis of character in politics.
- crisis of self-respect and morality in individual life.
- crisis of love and affection in family
- crisis of rationality and devotion in religion.

Moreover, in a blind rush towards technical and economic development, true meaning of development is lost and only lopsided development takes place and humanity becomes handicapped.

In such a situation when man wants to find direction, peace, balance, support and inner strength, he turns towards religion. Only religion is capable of bringing peace, equanimity, contentment, purpose in human life and developing trust in God. Only religion is capable of developing and sustaining the individual and the society.

But tragedy is that the religion has miserably failed, mainly due to

- Egoistic intellectuals totally disregarding the existence of God and the religion.
- Intoxicated and arrogant rulers rejecting God and His divine reign and negating their answerability and shaking the tenets of religion.
- The helpless skeptics, the coward rich and the so called practitioners of the religion removing the rationalism from the religion and making it ritualistic.
- Some trying to destroy the ritualistic religion and some following the ritualistic religion blindly.

And as a result

- Religion went in the hands of intransigent people.
- It lost its rationalism and dynamism and became bookish and ritualistic.
- Such weakened religion became a tool in the hands of the Rulers to divide the society.

So we can infer that;

- Such pessimistic and ritualistic religion can neither inspire leadership nor reconstruct humans and human culture,
- The religious leaders do not have right answers for guiding the human society; till then the society, religion, devotion would remain lifeless.

But can we disregard the religion?

Despite being terribly weakened by the attacks from within and without for centuries, religion has survived and still maintains its influence over the vast majority of society. It proves that it must have strong and profound fundamentals. So, we need to resurrect the dying religion, as religion, like mother, is the necessity for the human life on this planet. We need to bring out the core of the religion and re-establish it in the society.

An eclectic amalgam of the best in all religions is not the solution that we can bring about even if we want to. Diversity is needed and has always been there. What is desirable is to have equal status and respect for all religions, freedom to follow one's own faith and to choose the path towards God realisation shown by any other religion or faith, so that each one of us may find true peace. This alone can bring contentment and lasting peace in all human pursuits. We need to learn to look beyond the confines of our respective religions and appreciate other religions so that we can better integrate with the whole of existence.

Not *Sarva dharma samabhav* but *Sarva dharma sweekar*

meaning

Not only respect for all religions, but acceptance of all religions.

All religions are good and necessary, yet Devotion is beyond all the religions. Through devotion, one realises that there is only one God, one Spirit and that Spirit is within one and is pervading the entire universe as well. Due to one's relation with that Spirit, one's relation with the entire world gets established. Religion teaches to coexist peacefully, but devotion teaches to correlate with the entire world. At the Devotional level there are no barriers separating mankind, even the barriers of religion disappear. Once that stage is reached there is no need for pursuit of peace,

On the basis of a philosophy that accepts centrality of divine spirit in human life and the universe, Revered Pandurangshastri Athavale – Rev. Dadaji, my father, over a period of more than seven decades, succeeded in bringing man closer to man in a selfless loving relationship and created an ever growing family – global Swadhyaya family of more than 10 million people, from cross section of society, of which I am a part. We live together as children of one God that indwells in every heart. We work selflessly in the society on the basis of *Bhakti* - devotion, understood as loving and active expression of our gratefulness to God. Once the idea of indwelling presence; nearness of God; and relation with the Divine power is internalized, it is capable of resolving some intractable problems facing humanity. The knowledge and realization that the same God pervades every human heart, enjoins one in a divine relationship with the other by lowering every barrier; colour, caste, creed, language, nationality, religion, faith, etc., that separates man from the other. This helps us resolve the problems of relations in human society. We rely on voluntary transformation from within to resolve any conflict. It is not a theoretical construct. We, Swadhyayees, are actually doing it in our own small way and have shown that it is possible to achieve such a social order. We have common prayer place for all faith groups, we jointly celebrate festivals of all faith groups. All inter-personal relations are loving, selfless and devoid of any utilitarian motives.

Our conference, regularly organised by the Community of St. Egidio, has been able to shape a unique and exemplary group event that enables one to know what initiatives are working in which parts of our world; enables the participants to draw inspiration from such initiatives and carry this bundle of divine gifts to their own respective country and community.

*(It is my heartfelt desire that at any time in future, your work brings any one of you to India, we would welcome you to come and experience first-hand, the prevailing peace, happiness and love amongst us all and witness the subjective transformation taking place there.)*