
Sahaj Marg Study Group

Religion and Spirituality

Set 1, Handout 1 (From Principles of Sahaj Marg, Set 1, Page 3-11)

I have the honor to place before you some of the ideas that my Master, Shri Ram Chandraj Maharaj, has elucidated, particularly in respect of two terms—‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’. We assume that these terms are understood by even the ordinary educated citizens. These terms are considered, quite erroneously, to be synonymous. Perhaps these two terms are most naturally misunderstood as far as their mutual identification in respect of meaning, systematic thinking and obedience to principles and practices are concerned.

The system of Sahaj Marg, which is a system of yoga perfected by my Master on the foundations of a new yoga created by his Master who bore his name, has set out to cast new light on the fundamental concepts of religion, philosophy, spirituality, yoga, and indeed through a whole spectrum of terminology associated with such practices, and also to establish a correct practice towards attaining the right goal of human life.

All of you are no doubt aware that religious feeling has always been one of the fundamental emotive aspects of a man’s emotional make-up or psyche, and this is borne out amply by a study of anthropology from the earliest times of man’s appearance on this planet. Of course, the expression given to the religious emotional content has varied from race to race and from time to time, but that hidden craving in man’s heart which tended to seek an answer, or answers, to the questions which arose in him concerning the creation of the universe, the reasons for such creation and man’s own place and part in it, has not varied. Expression depends on development of thought; thought stems from ideas; and ideas of course are governed by the development of various features of man’s mental make-up, including such diverse factors as physiological, environmental and social.

A study of the history of ancient and modern religions, combined with a parallel study of anthropology, reveals that religious sentiment was almost simultaneous with man’s own appearance. In the beginning, the religious sentiment expressed itself mentally in terms of fear and awe leading to the worship, at least in bygone times, of animal life, vegetable life, the phenomena of nature, etc. All these later became ritualized into general forms of worship where the object of worship was nature, fire in its various forms, and worship of the dead. This form of worship prevailed through most of early man’s history, and was almost the only form of worship available and prevalent throughout the world up to the middle ages. Nevertheless, their very prevalence up to the emergence of higher forms of worship would appear to indicate that, in some measure at least, they had served to satisfy man’s internal craving for some form of communion with what may be called his Maker or Nature or Universal Spirit, or whatever else it may be called.

Later, this religious sentiment turned its attention to somewhat more sophisticated objects of worship and, at this stage, we can see the commencement of the representation of God in terms of anthropomorphic forms, i.e., in terms of human figures which the human imagination enriched and endowed with higher powers than merely normal human powers by the addition of extra arms, extra heads, a higher stature, and diverse other similar embellishments. The craving was the same; the mode of expression of the emotive sentiment was the same; all that had changed was merely the object which was now worshipped in place of the earlier primitive ones.

Yet later in the history of humanity there arose even more purified religions where we find the beginning of what may be called ethical codes and laws being given to the people, often through a leader of the people themselves, who was proclaimed as a religious leader or the giver of the law, the revealer of the truth and so on. We have historical personalities such as Christ, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Krishna, etc., in the various religions as an illustration of this development. This stage of development in religions can roughly be stated to cover the past few millennia of human history.

Analyzing the religious content and the modes of religious approach of those coming under its fold, we find that all religions have heavily relied on two important instruments for regulating and controlling the behavior of the flock under their control. These two instruments, by and large, have been fear and temptation. It is perhaps beyond any reasonable debate that this is an established fact. Religions have always held out to their devotees the temptation of redemption and a place in heaven, whether during the course of this life itself or after death. They have always tried to control and canalize man's behavior in a desired direction by trying to induce him to accept this temptation for the fruits offered by the respective religions. This is one side of the picture. How to enforce a man's behavior in the pursuit of the goal was the next question and here fear came in all too handy—the fear of punishment for swerving from the performance of religious rituals stipulated; the fear of punishment for not supporting the body of one's own religion in its continued existence; the fear of retribution for acts forbidden; and so on and so forth. Therefore, fear on one hand, and temptation on the other, would be a fair representation of religious activity, and religious control.

Modern psychologists will no doubt agree that an imposition on the human mind of two opposing forces of this nature could do nothing but create tension in the mind of the individual, and this tension cannot be eradicated by the practice of religion, because religion itself is the very force that created the tension in the first place. This would appear to indicate the necessity for a source outside religions to eradicate such tensions, and to normalize the human being at least in his mental make-up.

Perhaps the appearance of such diverse phenomena as the cult of hippyism, the associated habit of the taking of drugs and narcotics, the widespread and deeply penetrating discontent of the human being with his personal existence, which appears to pervade all sections of humanity at every stratum of social existence, all these would appear to be the results of such religious training which have not satisfied the real nature of man, nor given answers to his fundamental questions referred to earlier. You will pardon me if I therefore suggest that religions have not kept up with man's innermost needs and requirements of the soul. At this stage I may be permitted to add that it is not a failure in religion itself because, at the time when these great religions, whether Christianity, or Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Islam were founded, at that time the religious leaders who established them had moulded them into such shape, and given them such form as fulfilled the needs of humanity of those times.

It may also be noted that the founders of all great religions have preached love as being the only proper approach to the Creator, and this love, when properly cultivated by religious sentiment and religious practice, was expected to reflect in love for all that is contained in creation. How this has been forgotten, and religions have had to depend on temptation and fear, is the sorry story of religious decadence. Nevertheless, the fault can be attributed to lie in the fact that religions have become stultified, and to some extent petrified, and they have not altered or evolved in keeping with man's own evolution. I humbly suggest that the evolution of religion has lagged behind the evolution of man whom it is supposed or expected to serve for his vital inner spiritual needs.

This being the case as far as religion is concerned, what is it that spirituality has to offer? Now the term 'spirituality' has nothing to do with religion, as commonly understood. According to my Master, spirituality really begins where religion ends. While the basic education of man can be undertaken by religion, his further development when he has reached what may be termed adulthood can only be offered by spirituality. Spirituality is easily identifiable with mysticism in all its aspects. Religion enforces an externalization of the mind in man's search for God. Mysticism or spirituality internalizes the search and directs the mind to the heart of man where the search should really commence.

One of the great tenets or principles of all religions has been that at the heart of the human being God Himself resides. Of course this may be thought to be the mere doctrine of immanence; but it is true that God is immanent within us. When the search is externalized, the first thing man loses sight of, or touch with, is himself. The goal is taken to be far away, very often in some far distant sphere of existence not easily accessible to us. The search is therefore begun on the premise, often founded on solid theological doctrine, that the search will in almost all cases be futile and the goal inaccessible. The search is therefore begun and undertaken in a spirit of frustration and a foreboding of non-achievement of the goal. How can such a search ever help anybody? On the contrary spirituality focuses man's attention on the Divine effulgence radiating in one's own heart,

which effulgence is created by the presence of the Creator Himself in the heart. This immediately presents the Divine in an altered light, and brings Him to a proximity with one's own person which can hardly come any nearer. Being within us such a Person is not only always accessible but readily reachable, and all that spirituality requires of us to achieve the sense of oneness with the Ultimate is to focus the mind inward upon the Person. Apparently, therefore, spirituality is by far the easier method of the two to achieve the goal of human life.

Again, religion concentrates heavily on ritual worship. Taking a parallel from the childhood development of the human being, toys may serve children but real living things alone can bring happiness to adults. Therefore, performance of ritualistic modes of worship may be given in the formative years of a human being's life but, after a certain stage, they cease to have meaning and, for a majority of human beings, degenerate into mere mockery. Spirituality on the other hand does not specify or advocate ritualistic approaches. In spirituality all that is required to be done is to sit comfortably in a comfortable room, close one's eyes, turn the attention from the external world into the heart, and meditate on the contents of that heart in the shape of Divine effulgence emanating from the Being seated therein. Here there is no mummary or any other form of bewilderment, or what can in some religions even be classed as trickery, but there is an honest approach to the search for the Ultimate. Further, in the spiritual practice there are no associated threats or fears of retribution, nor are temptations held out to the seeker. All that is stated is that one's development depends solely and entirely on one's effort. If the practice is not indulged in, there is no benefit, and that is about all that there is to it.

Turning our attention once again to religion, it is a well-known fact that religions, while accepting or even arrogating to themselves the role of preservers of law and morality, have often signally failed in this duty for a very important but, at the same time, a very little noticed fact. I would like to emphasize this by inviting your attention to it, and it is this. Most religions while giving out their code of ethics or laws have only told their people what not to do. Therefore, these codes of behavior can at best be termed negative codes or negative laws, because most of them do not tell man what should be done to attain a better life. I agree that we must know what not to do, but certainly this cannot be taken as more than negative wisdom, nor can strict adherence to such laws be taken as more than negative virtue. But all too often we come across people who ask, "Well, I know what not to do, but it does not help me in knowing what I should do," and this again creates not only confusion but a tension in their minds, leading again to mental distress and possible ultimate deterioration in character itself. Spiritual edicts, on the other hand, have mostly confined themselves to precise and simple sets of injunctions stating very understandably to the seeker what exactly he should do. It is my contention that once a man knows what he should do, whatever be the field of action, whether professional, moral, social, it at the same time excludes the entire field of activity which should not be indulged in. The contrary, unfortunately, is not true. To know what one should do it is not enough

to know what not to do. This, to my mind, has been the greatest failure of religions throughout the world, and this was sought to be rectified by great spiritual Masters of the world.

It is common knowledge that religions have divided man from man, brother from brother, and often turned the father against the son, the husband against the wife, inciting much of humanity during history to violence against each other; because religions have their own separate gods of worship and the modes and rituals by which such gods should be worshipped. Religions, to hold their flock, have had to insist upon a strict adherence to their own religious paraphernalia while simultaneously forbidding even the thought of the gods of other religions. One of the paramount and deep-seated forces of hatred has been created by religion, and I believe this does not need any proof.

Spirituality on the other hand invokes no names, confers no attributes, demands no subservience to any such artificially created gods of the human mind, but focuses man's attention on the Infinite Ultimate Source of All Being Who, as aforesaid, is nameless, formless and attributeless. It is, I believe, a matter for easy agreement that such an approach to the Ultimate can serve as an integrating force and bring together human beings of all lands and all religions in oneness in the most fundamental aspect of human life, which is sadly lacking today. Spirituality, if widely practiced in this spirit of a humble approach to the Ultimate, is perhaps the most potent force that can bring about such an integration.

Unfortunately, there have been no spiritual systems as such comparable in power to the great religious systems, and this is surely the fault of man himself, in that he has allowed himself to be guided by the nose and made to subscribe to established bodies and organizations without examining in detail either their make-up or his own. Nevertheless, spiritual teaching and instruction, even from the Middle Ages, has not been lacking. There have been great mystics and Masters of spiritual teaching in all lands at all times. You have had in the West such great figures as Jacob Boehme, St. John of the Cross, and in the Orient there have been great savants such as the great rishis of Hinduism, Buddha—the founder of Buddhism, Confucius and Lao Tse in China. Masters have therefore not been lacking, but the fear element in religion has successfully kept away aspirants from coming out of religions and embracing spirituality. So we find in yet one more way religions doing disservice to man by preventing his evolution.

I have taken the liberty of giving you a few of our thoughts on religion and spirituality. I think at this stage I must introduce my Master's system of spirituality under the name 'Sahaj Marg'. The name Sahaj Marg means the natural way. In its basic teaching it offers what all other spiritual systems have offered. My Master does not lay any claim to originality in this system. It was, according to his own words, rediscovered by his Master, Shri Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh, a district town in U.P., India, and this word 'rediscovered' is important. My Master

has said that this system of Sahaj Marg, no doubt under a different name, was prevalent thousands of years ago, but was lost and had to be rediscovered again.

While we do not lay claim to originality, there are however very important and unique features which set Sahaj Marg as a system of spirituality apart from all others. What are these differences? The most important one is that in this system alone, to our knowledge, we employ what is known as transmission. This transmission is something unique and enormously efficacious in its application. What is transmitted is the Master's own yogic or life energy, which is transmitted into the heart of one who begins the practice of meditation in this system. This transmission is not something ephemeral or merely put in words but something which is very tangible, and to the reception of which innumerable practicants all over India, and an increasing number of persons in the West, can personally testify. The transmission by the Master has very great importance because by receiving it the student is able to develop with such pace that it is incalculable. Therefore, the student's own shortcomings have in a sense ceased to have any relevance to the possibility of his development. In all other extant systems of yoga, to confine ourselves purely to yoga for the time being, the reliance is entirely on oneself, and we all know how much capacity or power the average human being of today has in the field of self-development, or for that matter even how much of inclination he has! Therefore, if an outside source of Divine energy is available to us, willing to infuse us with his own energy, to fill us with it, and thus make evolution possible to us beyond the reaches of the wildest imagination, how very fortunate should we not consider ourselves in having such a source available to us today?

It is my great privilege to introduce to you such a personality in the person of my Revered Master, Shri Ram Chandrajī, who is before you all today. His services are available to one and all. In this system of Sahaj Marg there are no barriers of race, religion or sex. All are welcome to participate in the Divine experiment of self-evolution, and it is my earnest hope that all of you would like to undertake a trial to see for yourself whether this transmission exists or not, and to see what it can do for you.

I may assure you at this stage that there are no bondages implied or imposed upon you in any form. All that you are committed to do is to practice for a few months according to the principles set out by my Master and to test for yourself its efficacy, and if you are not happy with it, you are at liberty to bid goodbye to this system. Its principles do not in any way controvert or go against the individual's religious sentiments because the goal aimed at is the Infinite, Impersonal Almighty without form or attributes and is, therefore, a goal that must normally be acceptable to anyone, of whatever calling he may be. I therefore have pleasure in welcoming you all to this great system and I express the hope, with assurance, that there will certainly be great benefit from the practice of this system.