

# THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

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## Religion – is it for Violence or Peace?

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Religion. Many people feel that the world would be better off without it. Their sentiments can be understood considering that the modern times have seen large-scale violence in the name of religion.

### RELIGION & VIOLENCE - ARE THEY RELATED?

But is religion the only cause of violence?

The last century witnessed people fighting over practically every issue, including nationalism, regionalism, language, even sports. Most of the wars in recent times, and throughout history at large, have been fought due to greed for wealth and power. Religion is just used as a convenient scapegoat by the powers that be to conceal their grossly materialistic motivations.

If religion had been the singular cause of violence, then the countries where atheism was the national ideal should have been free from violence? Facts hardly agree with this conclusion, as can be seen from the history of the East bloc countries.

### IS RELIGION DISPENSABLE?

Can the human being really do without religion?

The universally accepted goal of life is the quest for happiness. When man neglects or rejects religion, then, consciously or unconsciously, his conception of his own self becomes "a lump of chemicals which has by chance come alive". The quest for happiness then degenerates into a savage struggle for carnal enjoyment. Wealth, women and wine (www) become the only goals of life. Such a conception of life is individually frustrating & globally disastrous.

The fundamental need of the individual is love; everyone wants to love and be loved. But in the material conception of life, there can be no such thing as real love. People put up a facade of love for another person as long as they get sensual pleasure from that person. When that stops, they dispose off their object of love (?) just as fast as they would dispose of a dysfunctional TV. And in their heart of hearts, people know that no one loves them, no one cares for them. Naturally they feel lonely, rejected, insecure and frustrated. This is the root cause of stress, hypertension, depression, all types of addictions, delinquency, criminality and even suicide. Studies in psychology have confirmed that there is no better an insurance for an individual from self-destructive behavioral patterns (including drinking,

substance abuse and suicide) than a strong religious faith.

At a global level the rejection of religion leads to a setting, wherein ethics, morality, selflessness, love all become utterly meaningless. Although the anti-religionist may feebly urge us to "be good", such an appeal falls on deaf ears. "If the goal of life is to enjoy and I am here for who knows how long and there is no life after death, then why wait? Just enjoy. Beg, borrow, steal or even kill, but enjoy." Thus making religion dispensable is tantamount to courting global disaster.

## RELIGION - THE VEDIC DEFINITION

So what exactly is this mysterious phenomenon known as religion? The Vedic texts of ancient India give an understanding of religion, which is quite different from the common understanding. (In order to avoid the negative connotations that the word 'religion' inevitably brings, we will use the word 'spirituality' to designate the Vedic understanding of what is commonly called 'religion'. The difference between the two terms 'religion' and 'spirituality' will be discussed in due course.)

According to the Vedic texts, spirituality imparts an individual with the vision to see the cosmos in the proper perspective and to live in harmony with it. The fundamental teaching of the Vedic texts is that the cosmos is made not just of matter; the cosmos has a spiritual dimension to it. The Bhagavad-gita (13.27) states, "Know that whatever you see in existence, both the moving and the nonmoving, is only a combination of the field of activities (matter) and the knower of the field (spirit)." Modern scientific research in fields like past life memories, near-death experiences (NDEs) and consciousness studies also strongly suggests that there is a spiritual part of our being which continues to exist even after bodily death.

The Vedic texts explain that our actual self is anti-material; our material body is animated by a spiritual particle called the *atma* or the soul. The supreme spiritual being who animates the entire cosmos is called the *Paramatma* or the Supersoul. And the relationship between the two - the soul and the Supersoul - is explained to be that of loving service, somewhat like that between a son and a father. This loving relationship exists eternally in the highest realm called the spiritual world. When the soul refuses to be in harmony with the will of the Supreme, this relationship is temporarily obscured. The soul is then placed in the realm of matter, which is the place where all of us currently reside.

The Vedic texts further explain that genuine spirituality is meant to awaken the soul to his original spiritual identity. This is effected through a harmonious combination of philosophy and religion, which constitute the two rails on which spirituality runs. The philosophy aspect of spirituality involves the study and understanding of matter, spirit and the controller of both - the Supreme. And the religion aspect involves the following of certain rules and regulations, which bring about the actual realization and experience of the spiritual realm.

## A HIGHER DIMENSIONAL SCIENCE

The striking similarity of this understanding of spirituality with the approach of modern science to study the cosmos is worth noting. Modern science involves the formulation of hypotheses to explain the observable phenomena within the universe (similar to the philosophy aspect of spirituality). And it also involves the following of certain rules, which regulate the laboratory environment in a way by which the validity of the hypotheses can be verified (similar to the

religion aspect of spirituality). Spirituality thus constitutes a higher dimensional science, in that it deals with realms of reality higher than the mundane.

The spiritual scientist, by dint of systematic practice of both philosophy and religion, realizes the actual nature of the cosmos and learns to live in harmony with it. Having realized his own identity as an eternal spiritual being and his loving relationship with the Supreme Being, such a realized spiritual scientist sees all living beings as his own brothers. His vision of universal brotherhood precipitates him to spontaneous, selfless and spiritual service towards all living beings. About such a spiritual welfare activist, the *Isopanisad* (Mantra 2) states, "One may aspire to live for hundreds of years if he continuously goes on working in that way, for that work will not bind him to the law of karma. There is no alternative to this way for man."

## THE CAUSE OF COSMIC DISORDER

Imbalance occurs in the cosmic order when the individual does not live in harmony with either of the energies of the cosmos. The preponderance of the material concept of life over the spiritual constitutes *dharmasya glanīh*, the decline of spirituality. Spirituality may decline when its religion aspect or its philosophy aspect or both are neglected. HDG A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON and author of the most widely read English commentary on the *Bhagavad-gita*, remarks, "Religion without philosophy is at best sentimentalism and at worst fanaticism. And philosophy without religion is just mental speculation." And absence of both religion and philosophy marks the degeneration of the human species to the animal platform. Whenever such a cosmic disorder occurs, the Supreme Being descends to the material realm to re-establish universal order by which humankind can once again learn to live in harmony with the totality of the cosmos.

In the present age, *dharmasya glanīh* is all-pervading since the aspirations as well as the achievements of practically the whole of humankind are all within the realm of matter.

Most people have no interest in philosophy whatsoever. Even those interested in philosophy mostly pursue it as means to an academic career or as a medium for intellectual aggrandizement and not as a zealous search for the Truth. Consequently they themselves are unable to understand the actual truths of the cosmos; the only service that they can do to their followers is to mislead them.

Similarly most people are not religiously inclined. Even those who are somewhat religious are mostly ritualistic and mechanical in their religious practices; they have little scientific understanding of what they are doing or why they are doing it. People often claim to be fighting to protect their religion, but if questioned they don't even know what the fundamental tenets of their religion are. And even if they know them, they are not interested in following those tenets. Such pseudo religionists are interested only in their personal aggrandizement and they use religion as a tool to promote it.

## CORRECTING THE IRON AGE CHAOS

The defects that have crept into spirituality can be compared to a cataract in the eye. To cure the eye, the cataract has to be removed; the eye should not be plucked out. Similarly the decline in spirituality has to be arrested; spirituality itself should not be rejected. Just as plucking out the eye would render the individual blind, rejecting spirituality *per se* will render humanity devoid of the precious eyes of divine wisdom resulting in disharmony and chaos. The spiraling rates of criminality and violence all over the globe give us a tiny glimpse of the anarchy that is in store if humanity continues to neglect spirituality.

To correct the enormous disorder prevalent in the modern times, the Supreme Being descends in a form, which transcends all restrictions of time and space. He descends in His Holy Names, which always stay with us, irrespective

of time, place and circumstance. That is why we see that all the major religions of the world including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism enjoin their followers to chant the Holy Names of God, which is the universal religion for the current age. And among the innumerable names of God, the Vedic scriptures assert that the most potent is the mahamantra or the Great Chant for Deliverance, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare.

The Supreme Being has also given a concise and complete manual for the present age in the form of the Bhagavad-gita, which constitutes the condensed essence of Vedic wisdom. It thus serves as the recommended textbook for the aspiring spiritual scientist. About the Bhagavad-gita, Ralph Waldo Emerson states, "I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad-gita. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."

## A CALL TO THE YOUTH OF INDIA

Eminent thinkers throughout the world including leading scientists like Nobles Laureates Charles H Townes and Richard R Ernst, peace workers like Noble Laureates Oscar Arias Sanchez and Betty Williams and spiritualists like Dalai Lama and Bhakti Swaroop Damodara Swami firmly believe that only a synthesis of science and spirituality can lead the world out of the present troubled times.

The youth of India have a unique position in the whole world. By virtue of birth in this holy land of India, they inherit the priceless wealth of spiritual knowledge expounded in the Vedic texts. And by virtue of their education and training, they have developed the scientific spirit of rational inquiry. Thus they are best suited to bring about the much-needed synthesis of science and spirituality that thinkers all over the world are searching for.

Prof Arthur Ellison, Head, Dept of Electrical Engineering, City University states, "Surely the great and unique contribution that India has made and must continue to make to the world's progress is in the field of religion - of truth and reality....India can most certainly help the West to find the spiritual way back towards reality which is essential for all real progress."

Therefore let the youth of India, in the true spirit of science, study the theory of spirituality with all seriousness and simultaneously perform the experiment of mantra meditation in their personal lives. Those who take up this challenge will become living spiritual scientists and will be instrumental in ushering in a new era of peace, understanding and harmony in the history of the world.

*Join us next month for another session of thought-provoking discussion.*

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# **The Spiritual Scientist**

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**Dedicated to**

**His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,**

**The Greatest Spiritual Scientist of the Modern Times**

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