

SPIRITUAL SOARING

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HAIL HARMONY

Harmony is reminiscent of rhythm and melody. In relation to human personality, harmony symbolizes inner impulses of peace, poise and placidity in thought, talk and action. A harmonized personality radiates serenity, calmness and composure in all weathers and walks of life. The diversities of persons and fortunes, favourable or hostile, that he has to encounter in life, do not perturb him, at all. He stays stoically steady with regal unconcern. Harmony is splendid state of serenity within and without. If you know how to preserve peace and harmony within (your mind and soul), you would certainly be at peace with the world without. And, in return, the world would, by and large, be at peace with you.

The hallmark of a harmonized or integrated personality is that he sees one in all and all in one. In other words, Harmony means hugging the whole world as your own self and your family - the Vedantic concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. A man of harmonious vision looks on the whole world as a wholesome mosaic of various gems threaded in a necklace. This is indeed the characteristic of a Brahma Gyani (illuminated person), as stated in Gita. In fact, a harmonized personage is verily a Brahma Gyani. For him, a friend or foe, gold or dust, adversity or prosperity, grace or disgrace, are all-alike.

It is a lack of harmony that has made the world a simmering cauldron of tension and turmoil. Harmony and kindred values - concord, consonance, compassion, co-ordination, cohesion and love - are fast fleeing away from human society. Families, villages, cities, states, countries, nay the entire world are writhing in the grip of discord and disintegration. For want of inner harmony, man had degenerated into a dreadful wolf and brute for his own species. This is obvious from the nightmare of nuclear holocaust under which he is living at the moment. The crucial question facing mankind today is, how to bring about renaissance of harmony. This problem, actually, involve inner transformation of human head, heart and the entire gamut of his beastly impulses. It is essentially a profound psychological and mammoth metaphysical project. It is a crusade of inner illumination for regeneration of transcendental and cosmic consciousness in the sordid human stuff. Love of man for man and his Lord constitutes the golden key to unlock the kingdom of harmony and happiness.

In this context, the Nirankari Mission, headed by the Nirankari Baba, and its tenets are making a rich and unique contribution. The Mission has its moorings in the gospel of harmony. Harmony being a spiritual attribute, its efflorescence can be brought about only by spiritual stalwarts and divine seers like Baba Ji. Take, for instance, the first pledge of the Mission: Human body, brain and all material possessions are divine trust to be utilized not only for individual evolution but for the welfare of the whole world. The question of the personal ownership by an individual - the basic cause of all conflicts - does not arise. The cosmic vision embodied in this pledge is, obviously, a noble endeavour for creating a universal man, who raises above all sordid and selfish sentiments. It roots out all conflicting compartments that divide man from man and knits them with the common chord of God - consciousness and His Fatherhood of entire mankind. The second pledge of the Mission expressly discounts all differences of castes, creeds, colour and status. It is a powerful weapon that cuts at the root of all communal conflicts and cleavages. Then there are the triple tenets of Seva (selfless sacrifice of mankind), Simran (god consciousness and remembrance)

and Sangat (participation in divine congregations). Regular practice of these sovereign recipes is sure to drive out the demon of disharmony from our minds and souls and generate a spirit of universal love and tolerance. We have no option but to become a Braham Gyani (enlightened being) to establish the sovereignty of harmony and happiness in our torn and truncated world.

Harmony is creative catharsis that confers bliss and beatitude. Hail harmony and banish hatred.

UNITY

The alpha and omega of human life is unity or oneness. This is the subtle mystical truth underlying the illusion of bewildering plurality. All of us emanated from the One; we are all sustained by the One and, ultimately, we will all merge into the One. Yet, during lifetime, we fail to see each other as one. That is why we do not evolve into one. Hence, we do not know any peace. For fragmenting and fracturing ourselves and our vision into so many splinters, we have to thank ourselves. Tensions, turmoils, sins, sorrows and sufferings are the natural outcome of ignoring the One. Harmony and happiness are the boons of the One. The highest rung of religion and spirituality is the unite state of consciousness. It, ultimately, culminates in the immersion of the individual self in the universal self, i.e. Absolute One. This, indeed, is redemption. In this unitary state of transcendent consciousness, man sees and knows the ultimate One (Reality) beneath all the apparent diversity. It is that ineffable state wherein the love, the love and the beloved are one; the seer, the sight and the scene are one; the seeker, the search and the sought are one; the entire creation and the creator are one. Love is the sine qua non of this unites state. The ultimate stage of merger in the One is preceded by unite contemplation of the One - the stage of Enlightenment. The objective of all mystical techniques is to terminate the multiplicity of thought and focus it at one point. In his famous work, *Verities of Religious Experiences*, says William James, "In the divine majesty, the 'me', the 'thou' and the 'we' are not found, for in the One there can be no distinction." This indeed is the life of the one spirit, advocated by the seers and prophets. In fact, all true morality lies in harmony with the One.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Yet, the apparent diversity of phenomenal existence and objectives is very much there in the universe. It greets us at every step. The seer, however, sees the basic unity beneath the veil of differential diversity. He views all this diversity with a towering tolerance unified vision. This had been the golden tradition of our country all down the ages. A garden looks more lovely and smells more sweet with a variety of flowers. This is the ultimate and eternal rule of unity in diversity, leading to the Kingdom of God itself.

SELFLESS SERVICE: A MYSTIC ANGLE

The sight of a boy, carrying an invalid child up a steep hill, made a passer-by remark, "That must be a heavy burden, Lad." The boy smiled and said, "Burden, by no means, Sir. The child is my own younger brother." Would that such a sweet spirit of universal brotherhood permeated every human heart, while sharing the burden of his fellow men. Selfless service truly signifies spontaneous service of humanity, after subtracting from the circle of its beneficiaries, one's own dear ones. The dawn of such a spirit would solve all the uphill tasks and turmoil faced

in the workaday life by an individual in no time. Selfless service is love in essence and action - the core of Christian gospel. It also enshrines the magnificent message of Christ: "Take up the cross and follow me." In lieu of his selfless service of enlightening mankind, Christ was, however, nailed to the cross. Is "cross" then the fruit of selfless service? The answer is both "Yes" and "No". The cross was, in fact, the instrument of suffering and self-abnegation, chosen by Christ to win the world back to God, through love and selfless service. That is why the sufferings undergone by the Christians in life are affectionately called by them as "crosses" - tiny splinters of the cross of Jesus. The "cross", actually, symbolizes selfless service for a noble cause and high values. It is both an agony and an ecstasy. Life is all through littered with "crosses". Those who, shoulder them serenely, are surely redeemed. Self-sacrifice knows no limit. Love, the bulwark of the devotees of self-sacrifice - illumined souls - drivers them to do anything and everything and everything for humanity - their beloved. All heroes, seers, martyrs and great men fall in this category. They always carry the "cross" calmly on their shoulders. Such people, mindless of their own risk, throw themselves in selfless service. Like Abu Ben Adam, they are the darlings of God - universal men.

Selfless service activates and sublimates our own slumbering souls. Subtraction of one's own gross self, ultimately, leads to desirelessness - the key to redemption. It purges us of all turbid impulses of self, i.e. egoism, attachment, avarice, aversion and anger. Selfless service teaches us to accept the kicks and kisses of life evenly. It is an instrument of our evolution and efflorescence. This discipline with its cosmic vision, takes us to fullness and fulfillment. True selfless service takes our neighbour and us to the tower of God and His righteousness. It transfigures and transmutes our life to reach the top. The essence of selfless service is crucifixion. Let us learn to crucify our baser passions and achieve regeneration.

DIVINITY IN THE DOCK

Overwhelmed by dark and dismal moments of dire misery, most of us are prone to put even God in the dock. Such moments of unmerited misfortunes are encountered quite often. A few illustrations. A bus carrying passengers is suddenly waylaid and the passengers gunned down in cold blood. An innocent virgin on her way to the college, is suddenly abducted, humiliated and disgraced by miscreants. A number of devotees engaged in prayers in a temple or mosque are killed by the collapse of a roof. A Mahatma Gandhi is shot to death, while praying in a congregation. Then there are terrific turmoil of wars, famines, floods, epidemics and earthquakes that entail deaths of thousands and lakhs of humans, without any apparent fault. How to explain these mysterious misfortunes!

Oh God

"Why all this, Oh God" is the anguished outcry of victims. "Nearly all religious say that all that happens is Your will. Where then in Your much lauded goodness, grace and compassion? Have You become incapable of managing the affairs of the world properly? Why is Satan still at large, playing so much havoc?" When nailed to the cross for disseminating his divine gospel, even Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Bible, Matthew 27:46)? After hearing our S.O.S. when the Almighty fails to avert impending and unwarranted calamities, our faith falters. Our entire moral and ethical edifice crashes. Voltaire,

no doubt, said, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invert Him." After witnessing all the unjustified suffering, the cynic, however, justifiably says, "Is it not advisable to abolish God even if one exists?" Wasn't Thomas Hardy right, after all? "Human affairs are generally governed by ruthless chance or relentless destiny. Not by a benign God." Blasphemous sentiments!

God's bounties

Against the long list of serious allegations against the Almighty must be set the manifold bounties so profusely bestowed by Him. From where emanates the inexhaustible wealth of food grains, fruits, animals and birds for nourishing and sustaining billions of humans? Who provides endless stocks of air, water, heat and light sine qua non for our existence? Who infuses in our inert frame of flesh, blood and bones, the ineffable flame of intellect and the spirit or soul? Surely, God, the infinite primal power. Has ungrateful man ever paused to ponder over the enormous price or value of various components of his fine frame, i.e. head, heart, eyes, ears, nose, hands and legs. Even the most skilful surgeon is incapable to procuring and piecing together these components into dynamic life. Though created in God's own image, the image is after all a finite thing. It suffers from fractional and fractured vision. It cannot envision the cosmic consciousness of the omnipotent original. That is why, man is quick to blame God for every wrong inflicted on him.

Man, the master of his destiny

The problem may, however, be viewed from another angle. The popular premise that not a leaf or branch can stir without divine decree and that God is the real background Actor of all human actions - adventures and misadventures - is a mere fallacy. It cannot be accepted at its face value. If cannot be accepted at its face value. If God created man in His own image, it was logically fair for Him to empower His image (the crown of creation) with a measure of His own omnipotence. And man has, actually, been so endowed with that power potential in the form of his free will or choice. Is not man then the architect of his own bloom or doom? This postulate is confirmed by the overriding Law of Karma (Action and Reaction) in the metaphysical realm. The impact of this law may range to several incarnations for its full manifestation. Every idea, word and action of ours, emanates from our own free-will and independent personality. It, ultimately, culminates in our destiny - all that happens to us. Why then put Divinity into the dock?

God, a Constitutional Head

We would also do well to realize that God is not an arbitrary or autocratic ruler. He functions only as a constitutional head. He does not rule. He simply reigns. He simply supervises the proper functioning of the fundamentals framed by Himself. All His so-called doings are, in fact, regulated by certain rational rules and regulations - physical and metaphysical. Outer or physical forces of motion, gravitation, liquids, gases, sound, magnetism, electricity and even atomic energy do not operate chaotically or at random. All physical, biological and chemical activities are governed by certain specific laws. These laws, originally, formulated by God or Nature were later on discovered by scientists through long researches. But there are still vast twilight areas of other laws, psychological, ethical and metaphysical, that are almost a sealed book for scientists. Certain glaring anomalies of life are so agonizing. The sinners, generally, flourish in life. The

saints and the virtuous, however, suffer. Such question marks throw a challenge to our psychologists, social scientist and mystics. Mammoth intensive research projects are needed in these spheres as also in the realm of mind and Karmic Law (Cause and Effect). Then some rational nexus will be traced between our 'unmerited' sufferings and our own doings. The myopic man, a microcosm, may then be able to probe into the vast magnitude of macrocosm.

Paradise regained

Man is said to have lost his perennial paradise by his disobedience of a divine decree. The paradise is not, however, lost for good. By identifying and illuminating his individual gross self with the glow of infinite and absolute self, man can, certainly, regain the lost paradise - kingdom of bliss and beatitude. Let him learn to break the barriers of flesh and finitude. Let man set himself (his spirit) in tune with the infinite and the universal self. And lo, he will at once be transmuted into the Infinite and the Universal, even in this life!

TOLERANCE, A TOWERING TRAIT

In the event of global contest in Tolerance, the Almighty God would easily secure asweeping success. The reason is crystal clear. He is gracious enough to tolerate and treat even agnostics and atheists, as nicely as his devotees. What is true of the Creator, does not, however, hold good of His animate creation. Lions, leopards, tigers, wolves, hawks and eagles do not tolerate the existence of weak and innocent creatures. They tear the latter to pieces. The gracious Almighty God surprisingly watches this ghastly game unconcerned. This, indeed, is beyond the range of human reason and logic.

Inanimate objects, e.g. plants, planets and food grains, however, observe the golden rule of tolerance. They act on the principle of "Live and let live", which sums up the significance of toleration.

Format

Laughing

Barbaric role of man

Man, the crown creation, created in God's own image, is doubtless the worst offender in tearing tolerance to pieces. His performance, in butchering and maiming his fellow men in religious and communal clashes, and orgies of war and violence leaves the beasts miles behind. The gospels of goodwill, love, compassion and self-sacrifice for our brethren, projected by prophets, saints and seers, from time to time, have made very little impact on our violent and aggressive nature. Iraq, Ceylon, Assam, Kashmir and Punjab are typical illustrations of our brutal bouts. Nuclear weapons now pose a terrific challenge to the ideal of tolerance, and even to the survival of mankind.

Dire need

It is in the domain of religion and faith that tolerance or its lack plays the most paramount role. The rigid stand in faith and religion culminate in communal bloods-baths and makes brute of men. Devotees of tolerance in these fields like Emperors Ashoka and Akbar are fondly remembered and revered even today. Tolerance, actually, means the capacity to endure a different culture, outlook or

ideology. In Gita (7:7), Lord Krishna expounded that all this (creation) is strung on him like clusters of gems on a necklace. This message of peaceful co-existence is, in fact, the essence of tolerance. Different flowers emitting their peculiar fragrance in a garden, too, project the gospel of tolerance. Different religions are just like variety of fragrant flowers.

Tolerance builds bridges of peace and goodwill in the midst of divergence and dissidence. There is no better antidote to wars and violence than the sweet spirit of tolerance. Democracy, in fact, rests on the foundation of tolerance. Our Constitution, too, is based on the bedrock of tolerance. The fundamental rights of Equality and Freedom, embodied in our Constitution, too breathe the spirit of tolerance. In fact, even the United Nations Organization is powerful manifestation of the supernal spirit of tolerance. It provides a common forum for countries following antagonistic ideologies and systems of government, to sort out their conflicts peacefully.

Implications

Tolerance teaches us to impose a conscious control on our wild and wayward impulses. It symbolizes spiritual disciplines of Daman (suppression of vicious passions), Sanyam (self-control) and Pratyahara (restraint of senses from external objects), which are stepping-stones to higher consciousness and illumination. The spirit of tolerance also induces us to let the other man follow his own pattern of life and philosophy, and rightly restrains us from interfering in his affairs. Such an attitude of tolerance mitigates frictions and fissures in human relations and enhances our joy and pleasure. Tolerance saves us from the onslaughts of anger, and enables us to see the entire mankind as our own kith and kin like a Brahm Gyani (realised soul). It would not be wrong to say that tolerance is the first step towards enlightenment and bliss.

Practical Tolerance

A Pathan was once hired by the enemies of Saint Ek Nath to break his proverbial forte of cool. Just after his holy bath in the Ganges, the Pathan spat on him. Unruffled, the saint had a holy dip again. This operation of repeated baths and desecration was enacted one hundred times. The saint, however, stayed perfectly serene as if nothing had happened. This touched the heart of the Pathan profoundly. He fell at the feet of the saint and sought forgiveness.

A Christian thinker has rightly remarked: one, who endures all, conquers all. Another thinker had elucidated the concept of tolerance thus: " I do not agree to even one word of what you say, but I would defend to death your right to it."

Should the virtue of tolerance be left unbridled and be exercised without any deadline? Certainly not. It should not be overdone indiscriminately, but it should also not be taken as token of weakness. Tolerance should not be permitted to violate wholesome norms - social, ethical, legal or spiritual. Only then will this towering trait of tolerance promote the welfare of society. Let us always realize: Your God is also my God.

MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURES

Like ever-changing styles of hair and dress, certain religious concepts, too, vary with time. For centuries, scriptures have been held in great reverence for

projecting priceless message of love and light for mankind. However, a good many persons are growing allergic towards the scriptures and their quotation. A tendency to treat them as archaeological antiques is manifest. This is certainly an ominous development.

Scriptures are believed to be Word of God Himself, compiled under divine direction. Or, they are known to have been written by prophets, god men, saints and seers under divine inspiration. The scriptural quotations have, by and large, been recorded in majestic and melodious poetic language that transport the devotees into divine ecstasy and trance. The sweet and soothing impact and thrill of listening to hymns of scriptures on frayed nerves and turbulent minds is unquestionable. Believers even find solutions to their perplexing problems in hymns of their particular scriptures opened at random. Though couched in different languages and styles, the keynote and highest common factor of various scriptures is essentially the same. They chant the glory and supremacy of God. They also inspire man to lead a godly and righteous life of love and selfless service.

In this nuclear age of virulent violence terrorism and towering hatred, never was the message of scriptures more relevant and direly needed than today. The present-day dismal scenario is, in fact, due to loss or decline of our faith in scriptures. Such decline of faith, in truth, amounts to decline of faith in Almighty Father and His doings. A family or society which becomes a victim of this malady, i.e. loss of divine faith, is doomed to decay and disintegration. This is the grim fate that faces mankind today. With the unleashing of nuclear warfare and vanishing faith in the scriptures and the Supreme Father, there is a genuine apprehension, that ours may be the last generation of mankind.

Every scripture, if read between the lines, is a gold mine of God-knowledge (Brahma Gyan) or Enlightenment. It is a treasure trove of high vision and values, love and light. How can there be any bond of universal brotherhood between man and man, without consciousness of a common universal Father? This is, indeed, the message of scriptures that we are forgetting to our cost.

The role of scriptures in regenerating sagging human character, personality and hence human destiny is beyond belief and expression. What education and psychology failed to accomplish in years, a word from scriptures did in a moment. The pious state of human heart and soul, while participating in a congregation, is an unmistakable pointer to the transcendent impact of scriptures. All turbid and base impulses evaporate from human heart in rapport with the Father in a congregation.

Chanting from scriptures are known to have wrought miracles. Sullied sinners, assassins, dacoits and fiends were sublimated into saints and seers by the clarion call of scriptures. Some of the instances of such ascension and transformation are to be found in the persons of Balmiki, the dacoit, Kauda, the fiend, Ajamal, the robber, Sajjan, the swindler and the assassin. Ganka, the prostitute, etc. They and many other debased and depraved persons were redeemed by the spell of scriptures. Why can't you and I, particularly, when the Nirankari Baba, the contemporary True Master, is ready to bestow on the aspirants the true essence of scriptures?

HAIL CONTENTMENT

"Dissatisfaction is life, contentment death," says the go-getter. Power, position, pelf and pleasure stay poles apart from the contented man. Contentment stands for stagnation and senility. It rules out evolution, dynamism and development. Contentment is the coveted kingdom of a lotus-eater and languor. Not for him fields fresh, and pastures new! He is even content with his miserable and lowly lot till eternity. With this lacklustre picture, would you still vote for a contented life? By all means.

The above putrid picture of contentment has to be taken with a grain of salt. Calmness, steadiness, peace and serenity of the contented person is indeed the envy of gods, and dwellers of heaven. The contented man is free from avarice and ambition - a Jivanmukta (liberated one). His is a liberated soul, free from the bonds of matter and mind. He is a citizen of the spirit, ever free and unfettered. Contentment does not mean a life of inertia and stagnation, but one of slow and steady action and elevation. The contented man may lack the fire, fury, glamour and glitter of the ambitious and the enterprising folk. But he enjoys the wealth of abiding peace and happiness. Unlike common man, he is free from turmoil and turbulence - the hallmarks of hell.

A discontented person is greedy and selfish. He cannot even think of sharing the boons and bounties of life with his fellow men. Nor is he grateful to God for these dainties. On Gita (3:12), Lord Krishna has censured such a selfish/discontented man as a "thief". The contented man is fully satisfied with the share of material and mental assets allotted to him by Divinity. He, however, continues his smooth march onwards towards perfection and excellence. But to achieve all this, he banks on the grace and benevolence of God. Content and humble, he himself would not take any credit for his achievements. He does not lose his balance and cool even if his enterprise fails. That is the essence of contentment. Gita (3:20) advocates an active and earnest performance of one's duty. The contented man does not seek satisfaction in position and possessions from without. He finds it in his inner self, full of abundance of life, peace and plenty. The contented one never loses his sense of values and discrimination. Unlike the discontented person, poets, thinkers and mystics have invariably appreciated contentment as a source of bliss in this world of tempests and tensions.

Be content with such things as you have.

-Bible (Hebrews 13:5)

When we have not what we like, we must like what we have.

-Bussy

Sweet are the thoughts that savour of content. The quieter mind is richer than a crown.

- R.Green

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

-Shakespeare

The discontented man looks before and after and pines for what is not. His mind is always simmering for more and more. He is a seething cauldron of greed in this world and beyond. He is a helpless slave of his senses and sense-pleasures and undergoes the cycle of births and deaths. The contented man may look poor because of his spirit of renunciation, but he enjoys riches of fullness and fulfillment, flowing from the spirit. Hail Contentment.

THE IDEAL VS. THE ACTUAL

The two points are poles asunder - the ideal and the actual. The distance between them is so daunting. The ideal is, generally, all lilies and roses. The reality, so crude and rude! This contrast is painfully true of principle vis-à-vis practice, of Dharma vis-à-vis Karma, as well. With all the breathtaking advances achieved by man in every field, it has not been possible to bridge the chronic gulf between the ideal and the reality. It is, indeed, a profound and perplexing problem a challenge for philosophers, psychologists, social scientist sand even sages, seers and statement for centuries. What then is wrong and where? The common man does not doubt the supremacy and excellence of high pristine values fortified by the essence of all religious. But where he fumbles is the point when he steps into the realm of practical reality and action. His ideals and principles then clash with his personal and gross self. He then bids good-bye to all high values forthwith and behaves like a self-seeking brute. For instance, every individual and nation swears by peace. They, however, plunge into violence and war, the moment their personal and material citadel is at stake. The devil overpowers the divine.

I hold the conviction that man, the crown of creation, had not seriously applied his head and heart to the fundamental problem of living up to high ideals in actual practice. No Five Year Plans and projects for reconstruction of human character and personality, to bridge the gaping gulf between the ideal and the actual. For, this naturally embraces the entire gamut of human breeding, education and training all along the line.

The individual is, no doubt, the unit of human society. We would have a society of heroes or villains, according as we make an individual a hero or villain. In this context, the home is naturally the matrix and cradle of breeding the human child, ideally. The crucial question for consideration is how and to what extent, home, sweet home, is being reared to streamline the breeding of the child. Have the parents prescribed a specific time everyday for streamlining the breeding of their children? The answer in more than 90% cases is "no". How to fix and earmark such a period? No amount of laws can do the needful. What is, actually, needed is an all-pervasive and holistic consciousness and the urge to elevate ourselves and our children to a higher level of life of sterling values. It is just like the contemporary consciousness to have a clean environment, and a daily bath. This consciousness for public causes will have to be created with the aid of media, i.e. the newspapers, the radio and the television. Actually, it would be a simple process of family gathering at the break and close of day. The gathering should open with a fervent prayer to God to improve us every day, in every way. The prayer should be followed by inspirational instruction by the mother or the head of the family to lead a noble and moral life. Such an instruction should give the pride of place to cultivate the higher values of humanism, selfless service, broad-mindedness and universalism. The evening gathering should be devoted to self-

appraisal of our performance during the day of practicing the aforesaid values. Such a moral and spiritual exercise, day in and day out, would positively raise the quality of our life.

The next institution for the uplift of our character and personality is, of course, the school. Here the Education Department should prescribe compulsory a specific period daily for moral and spiritual instruction, theoretical as well as practical. Such a period must be fixed everyday for colleges and universities students, as well. Every school, college, university and competitive examination must have a compulsory paper, practical and theoretical, on moral, social and spiritual education. High jobs in public and private sectors should be reserved by rules and regulations for candidates with high score in moral and social education.

The Nirankari Mission reiterates that the panacea for all moral, social and spiritual ailments is, of course, God-consciousness and good-reliance. The Nirankari Baba has happily introduced an innovation in the shape of Bal and Yuva Sangats (children and youth congregations) of the Mission. These Sangats function independently, though under the active guidance of seasoned stalwarts. The guiding star and the focal activity of the Yuva Sangats is to inspire and yoke youngmen in practical constructive and selfless service of humanity in floods, famines, earthquakes and other natural calamities. Coupled with the spirit of service is the constant practice of God-remembrance and participation in congregation. This new class of young missionaries would, naturally, constitute a nucleus of altruistic and active band of selfless workers right from their infancy. This reform would forge ahead into a revolutionary force for regenerating and redeeming mankind of all evils.

Such a enterprise would help establish the much coveted Kingdom of God, so fondly cherished by our True Master, by transforming our character and personality. Let us pray for the transmutation of the crude reality into enchanting realistic ideal.

TAKE IT EASY

Do you moan and groan frantically when assailed by any affliction? And, do you go into ecstasy in case of a sudden boon or windfall? Well, both the states are abnormal eruptions of emotions, unbecoming of the dignity of an illumined personage. The latter does not wear his heart on his sleeve. He takes it easy, rain or shine, distress or delight, pain or pleasure, success or failure, grace or disgrace, kicks or kisses. Such opposite developments or states are all integral attributes of human life. They are just two sides of a coin, neither good nor bad. Shakespeare said, rightly, " Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so." It is our mind's reaction to sour or sweet sensations or experiences that makes them appear good or bad. The Gita enjoins that these opposite sets of experiences should be endured calmly.

The guiding star of saints and seers is to keep their cool under all circumstances. They invariably maintain their balance and serenity. They are not ruffled or upset by the fall of a hat or even sky. In spiritual terms, this state of serenity is known as "Sahj Avastha" or a spirit of stoicism. The greatest benefit of such a calm stance is that it enables us to preserve and promote our reserve stock of energy for outstanding achievements. For instance, even if a person of high caliber falls

a prey to gusts of passions like extreme anger, he forfeits all love and reverence in society. He is also rendered incapable of doing any solid or creative work. Serenity, on the other hand, lends us great strength and endurance. It is also an embellishment of great men, saints and seers.

Emotional outbursts are not controlled by counter-outbursts. Fire never quells fire. This job is done by cold water. Similarly, a simmering mind is set at rest by the balm of cool temper.

The source and fountainhead of serenity is, of course, God-consciousness. God is, in fact, the reservoir of infinite peace and serenity. Hence those, who integrate themselves with the Almighty, are a beacon-light of peace and tranquillity. On the contrary, those, who alienate themselves from the Lord Master, run amuck like brutes and beasts and cause havoc all-around.

A serene and steady state of mind, free from tensions, liberates us from upheavals and eruptions and serves as the key to salvation, here and hereafter. It makes us Jivanmuktas (liberated beings), the envy of angels. Many glowing instances of evenness and equanimity can be cited. Horrific consequences entailed by loss of balance, too, are not wanting. Loss of composure has led people to lunatic asylum or even to commit suicide. If the rulers and generals of various countries learn to keep their mental balance and cool in spite of selfish motives and irritants, war would certainly vanish. A golden age of peace would dawn. In case every man were to keep an even temper in day-to-day life, the Kingdom of God would be round the corner.

Once a miscreant hurled a volley of abuses on Lord Buddha, without any rhyme or reason. The latter smiled and put a simple question to that fellow: "Supposing a person does not accept a gift brought by a friend, what would happen to the gift?" The miscreant blurted out, "The gift would naturally remain with the person who brought it." Lord Buddha quietly said, "My friend, I refuse to accept your gift (of abuses)."

The wife of Socrates, the eminent Greek philosopher, was a lady of violent temper. Once when he came home a bit late, she hurled a pitcher full of water on his head. The philosopher said, softly, "Madam, you have today been able to refute the popular proverb: Thundering clouds seldom rain."

A wicked Pathan once spat a hundred times on the face of Saint Ek Nath, each time the latter came out after having a dip in the Ganges. The Pathan was determined to violate the saint's high image of equanimity. The saint, however, remained unperturbed all through. The Pathan's stock of saliva was exhausted after the hundredth assault. The smiling face of Ek Nath transmuted the Pathan and he fell at the feet of the saint to seek forgiveness.

One fine morning, when the morning Sangat (Congregation) was in progress, Baba Buta Singh* put a question to the devotees whether any change was evident in the expression of Baba Avtar Singh, who was participating in the congregation as usual. There was no tangible difference in the expression of Baba Buta Avtar Singh and the devotees said so. Baba Buta Singh then led the devotees to the inner room of Baba Avtar Singh's house and showed them the

dead body of Baba Avtar Singh's son, who had expired the previous night. The death of his son had, however no effect on Baba Avtar Singh's evenness.

While nailed at the cross, the last wish expressed by Jesus Christ was, "Father, forgive my tormentors. They do not know what they are doing."

Thus, equipoise or even stance is an invaluable asset of the realized personages (Brahm Gyanis). Even thunder and earthquake lull them to sleep. So, kindly take a solemn vow to take it easy, in order to make your life and the whole world easy.

PEACE, NOT PIECES

For centuries, the hapless humanity has been pining in vain for the dawn of the peace in and around it. Instead of peace, turmoil and turbulence, generally, fell to its lot. Why lot? The truth is that man, the crown of creation, himself opted for turmoil. He willfully broke himself into (so many) pieces and lost the benign battle and the boon of peace. The pieces and fragments into which man has split himself are surely his diverse castes, creeds, communities, religions and, last but not least, parochial prisons of his selfishness and greed. In sum, man has missed the pristine consciousness of his unitary divine origin. He has reduced himself to a fraction from the whole. He has come tumbling down from the pedestal of fullness and fulfillment and fractured himself into pieces. The holistic spirit of our relationship with the Whole has evaporated from his head and heart. Peace has naturally eloped from man's heart and habitat. It has practically died, after languishing in coma for centuries.

The problem facing mankind today is how to resurrect the nymph - the divine goddess of peace. The solution is quite simple. We must piece together the scattered pieces of the skeleton of peace and knit them into a living and holistic necklace of universal peace. Yes, the necklace visualize by Lord Krishna in Gita: (7:7)

All this (residents of the universe) stands hung on Me like gems on one and the same necklace.

Such a high consciousness of "Togetherness", of being part and parcel of the whole divine necklace, of belonging to the Whole has got to be resurrected. How to infuse life into the gasping nymph of peace? The True Master, the Nirankari Baba has openly proclaimed the triple prescription of Seva (Selfless service), Simran (God-consciousness) and Satsang (participation in Congregations). A daily dose of these three medicines would work like elixir in human spirit. The fragmented feelings of duality, disintegration, multiplicity and otherness for our fellow-brethren shall then be replaced by those of complete harmony and wholeness. The celestial concept of the entire creation located in the creator and vice versa, envisaged in the Gita, must be practiced by us as a loving and luminous reality:

Arjuna, acquiring that Knowledge, you will no more be subjected to delusion like this, and through it you will see all beings first in your own self and then in Me (the Over Soul). (4:35)

The Yogi, who is united in identity with the all-pervading infinite consciousness, and looks on all with an equal eye, sees the Self-present in all beings, and all beings existing in the Self.

He who sees Me (the Universal Self) presents in all beings, and sees all beings existing in Me, I am never out of sight of him, nor is he ever out of sight of Me. (6:29-30)

The regenerated peace shall then come running to embrace us. For, we would be 'pieces' no longer but 'whole'. We should pledge to be perfect as our Supreme Father, as enjoined in the Bible and our contemporary True Master.

TOLERANCE WITHOUT TEARS

Can you practise tolerance without tears, while suffering tyrannies of a brutal bully? If you can, all kudos for you. For centuries, we Indians meekly tolerated agonizing atrocities of powerful foreign rulers. This type of tolerance was, in fact, a virtue of necessity. It was a testimony of our cowardice and lack of prowess. The result is an open secret. Our personalities were perverted. Our character and values were debased and depraved beyond measure.

In the medieval age, the Hindus sought refuge from the persecution and intolerance of foreign rulers in the Bhakti cult. Saints like Tulsi Dass, Mira and Kabir taught us the message of tolerance as a divine decree, to put up with arbitrary actions of foreign rulers and their cohorts. We were supposed to reap the rich reward of our tolerance in the next world. How far was this lesson of tolerance a real or empty consolation is a moot point.

In the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi, however, gave a new depth and dimension to the concept of tolerance in the form of "Satyagrah". This new strategy meant non-violent but resolute, co-ordinate and organized non-cooperation and resistance against the authors of torture and tyranny. Gandhi Ji's new technique, ultimately, uprooted even the mighty British in India. His was a lesson of tolerance without tears - tolerance with a grain of salt and moral force. It was not an abject surrender to oppression. Unlimited tolerance, ultimately, spells our doom and destruction. Society is, no doubt, sustained by the doctrine of tolerance and mutual adjustment, but not at the cost of basic norms. It is not humanly feasible to practise unalloyed and unlimited tolerance in our day-to-day turbid life.

In the domain of faith, religion and metaphysics, tolerance, however, have the pride of place. The Bible exhorts us to offer our other cheek to one who slaps us on one cheek. Christ also said:

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. (Bible, Matthew 5:5)

The Quran too projects the message of tolerance in no uncertain terms:

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

(Quran 29 : 45)

In the Bhagvat Gita, Lord Krishna, too, extolled tolerance:

My face is equal to all creation.

(Gita 9 : 29)

He, who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, foes, the indifferent, the hateful, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels.

(Gita 6 : 9)

He who established in unity, worshipped Me, abiding in all beings, that Yogi liveth in Me, whatever his mode of living.

(Gita 6 : 31)

Lord Buddha proclaimed love, non-violence and tolerance as the essence of his creed.

Lord Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, went miles beyond toleration. He made Ahimsa (non-injury) towards all living beings, as the kingpin of his teachings. A particular principle pronounced by him was that of Sayyadwad. This principle exhorts us to recognize and tolerate wide diversity in words, thoughts and deeds among different humans, as an inexorable ingredient of life and law of nature.

The Vedantic tenet of Tat Twam Asi (Thou art That - God), also vindicates tolerance and universalism.

THE TRINITY

On the mystic, modalities of the trinity of mind, matter and spirit, operates the whole panorama of human life. Under the glamorous spell of matter and mind, man depraves himself into a devil. But he is capable of transmuting himself into the divine. This sublime status, he can achieve, by giving due place to the spirit in his life. In other words, man must integrate his individual spirit with the universal spirit. This requires evolution of a higher or macro order instead of a micro vision and values. Such a vision sees the Supreme (God) seated in every being and every being seated in the Supreme. Hell, heaven and redemption are not outstations in space and subterranean regions for rewarding and punishing man. Actually, they are just peculiar states of the mind and spirit of man ruling in specific moments and circumstances. These states are by and large generated by man's own thinking and doing.

Immunization against hell

What stance and style of life should man imbibe to immunize himself from the environment of hell? How to secure a safe seat in the kingdom of heaven and redemption? This crucial question has posed a powerful challenge to the philosophers, prophets and seers of the world. But the answer is damned simple. By pampering his mind, matter and senses, man's life has gone awry. His career has generally become one of simmering torment and turbulence, bereft of all bliss and beatitude. It is the balanced blend of matter, mind and spirit that can ensure abiding peace and bliss for man. This is a million dollar secret. But it is surprising that even after knowing this secret, very few humans strive to strike a balance between the activities of three members of the aforesaid trinity. How little time, care and nourishment do we allocate daily for the welfare of our spirit vis-à-

vis our mind, body and material pursuits. The relative weights, obviously, tilts heavily and blatantly towards matter and mind. In our scheme and pattern of life, the spirit gets the last place and priority, if at all. For enriching and ensuring our physical fitness, we eat four times a day, take some sort of exercise once or twice a day, wash our body at least once a day, and earn our (material) living for about six to ten hours a day. Similarly, for refreshing and nourishing our mind, we read a variety of magazines, newspapers and books, see pictures and television hear music and practise various hobbies. But how much time and 'diet' do we spare for our poor spirit, the alpha and omega of life? By and large, our spirit had to face starvation or semi starvation. The disproportionate emphasis on matter and mind and neglect of the spirit, really, explain why human affairs are in dreadful disarray. The boat of our life is going to capsize because of serious imbalance in the three members of the trinity. Man trips and tumbles nearly at every crucial step for this reason. Like a brute, he is out to prey on and swallow even his own species.

Diet for spirit

What exercise and 'diet' does our spirit need to enable it to play a dynamic and creative role? The sovereign prescription according to the consensus of saints and sages, consists in Satsang (participation in congregation), Simran (God-consciousness), and Seva (selfless service or sacrifice). On this triple exercise hinges the efflorescence of our spirit. Then our spirit will function for us like Allah's Lamp in all our activities. And Allah's Lamp is far more powerful than the proverbial Allah Din's lamp.

Role of mind

The role of human mind in establishing a nexus between the individual spirit and the Supreme Spirit is extremely significant. Mind is, in fact, the bridge between the body and the soul. It has a powerful potential for good or evil. By stilling the mutations of the mind and achieving its one-pointed concentration on the spirit, we can acquire supernatural or Brahmic powers for self-evolution. Thereby spirit will become a channel for flow of divine powers and bliss in our life. If left unbridled, our mind will, however, run amuck and drag us down the drain. Let us mind our mind and strike a blissful balance between the members of this trinity to enjoy a happy and joyful life, unruffled by weal or woe. The Sant Nirankari Mission is playing a vital role in this direction.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SCRIPTURES

The hymns of nearly all scriptures are remarkable for their symphony, sweetness, sublimity and serenity. Even a passer-by cannot fail to be fascinated by the melodious notes of scriptural hymns chanted in a temple, church or Gurdwara. The common man meshed in the mud-puddle of workaday life is transported into higher regions of bliss and beatitude by the impact of mystical hymns. Despite the magical charm exercised by scriptural hymns, even some of the devotees various religions, however, possess only limited or superficial knowledge of their scriptures. This anomaly or lacuna is obviously due to the erosion in the values and vision of the bulk of mankind in the moral and mystical life of the spirit. Materialism, mammon, and scramble for the sordid self have obviously accentuated the animal and savage spirit in man. Perverse violence, and brutal terrorism, is rampant in all corners of the globe. Compassion, love, fellow feeling and altruism seem to be on the run. I am convinced that such a

steep decline in our moral and spiritual values is due to lack of knowledge and faith in our scriptures. Needless to say that scriptures enshrine our most valuable heritage of high idealism. To brush or throw aside such a gold mine is to slash the tree on which we are sitting.

Doubtless, scriptures are the fulcrum and foundation of human civilization and brotherhood, as also our identity with God, our Supreme Father. On analysis, love for the Lord and our neighbour is the highest common factor and master key of all scriptures. For, love is, after all, the heart-beat of all creation. Scriptures teach us to salute the divinity immanent in all beings. They also bring home to us that God is the source and sustenance of the entire creation. And, separation from the source positively spells our doom. Scriptures further enlighten us that our peace, prosperity and poise, hinge on our remaining in tune with our source, i.e. the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient God.

ARE YOU DEAD OR ALIVE?

Are you dead or alive? If alive, you had better die to yourself. And the sooner, the better. A cynical verdict? No. Dying to oneself ultimately opens the entrance to life abundant, eternal - the life of the spirit. So said Christ and Kabir, two celebrated seers:

Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it dies, it beareth much fruit.

-Bible (John 12:24)

Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.

-Bible (John 3:3)

*Kabir, Ji's Marne Te Jag Darey Mere Mun Anand Marne Hi Te Paiyey Puran
Parmanand*

(Death, which is dreaded by the world, imparts perfect solace and bliss to me.)

-Kabir (Adi Granth, p.1365)

Philosophy of Death and Cross

The above mentioned classic quotations convey a profound philosophy. Eternal bliss, bloom and a berth in the Kingdom of God can be attained only through death, rebirth and the cross. Physical death and rebirth? No. In the current context, these terms carry a mystic and figurative connotation. Actually, it is the gross values that have to be put to death. And in their place, have to be installed higher values of the spirit. This is indeed the real import of the illumined injunctions of Christ and Kabir.

This brings into focus the concept of cross and its profound clarion call. In the Christian philosophy, "cross" conveys the message of suffering and self-sacrifice. These twin traits are the open sesame to regeneration and redemption. That is why Jesus said:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

-Bible (Luke:9:23)

Dying to oneself and "cross" are, in fact, synonymous. They represent a self-transforming crisis and catharsis. By carrying the yoke of the "cross", you emerge as a new being, with a new vision.

Stoicism

Stoicism gives you a new perception of life in all its depth and height. By dying to yourself, you become dead, i.e. immune to all the chaotic cravings of the flesh and the senses. You become a stoic, indifferent to and unruffled by all storms of perverse passions and pleasures. Hell, heaven, thunder and lightning cannot disturb the state of your sovereign balance and unconcern. Such persons though apparently dead (to physical and mental upheavals), are spiritually dynamic. They do not live by the sand-glass but by universal love and light. They transcend the tensions of the transient.

In his teachings, Lord Buddha, too, advocated death of desires as a panacea for human sorrow and suffering. To be dead while alive, also postulates humility par excellence. In other words, this means shedding of egoism, the greatest impediment to bliss and beatitude. Humility is, in fact, the hallmark of an enlightened person. In order to redeem and rejuvenate ourselves, let us take up the "cross" and learn to die to ourselves.

CLEAR THE DEBT

Man is a born debtor. God is an unborn (and undying) creditor. Every object and creature owes a debt to its creator. Man's debt to God, however, is much deeper and well nigh irredeemable. For, he has been endowed with human incarnation (even though on loan or trust). And human incarnation is said to be the envy of gods. It is pertinent to probe whether any positive step is taken by man to repay the divine debt. The response, by and large, is far from encouraging, though everyone has to beg or borrow from God.

Let us reflect on how God desires us to repay the debt. Surely, He does not want us to 'return' our body and soul. All that He expects from us is to remember him lovingly and with gratitude, day in and day out. We should also glorify Him collectively in the congregation. God's brief but mandatory command to man (according to the New Testament) is "Love thy Lord (God) and love thy neighbour (every man)". The irony, however, is that the love expressed by man towards God as well as man is only lip-love. It does not reach out from the soul and heart. How can lip-love expect to be reciprocated by true love?

The debt granted by God to every human in terms of various organs and faculties - physical, mental and spiritual - is, however, priceless. Just evaluate the price and value of every limb. It runs into lacs of rupees. In lieu of such boons (though

on loan), how many hours of minutes do we devote to God-remembrance out of twenty-four hours a day? The assessment is awfully adverse. How ungrateful we are!

Besides individual and personal bounties, God has also placed us under other debts through His agents. These agents are the sun, the stars, the moon, the air, the water (rivers), the mountains, the forests, the fruit - bearing and other trees, etc. The Quran and the Gurbani tell us that at the dawn of creation, God commanded these agents to serve mankind. And they have been doing so faithfully for aeons. Man is the only ungrateful creature out of the entire creation, who has dared defy God's command "Love thy neighbour". This defiance is downright ingratitude and subversion of the divine debt and decree. Instead of loving his neighbours, he is out to slaughter them on a mammoth scale by means of terrific weapons. Consequently, God has 'slaughtered' man's peace of mind and bliss and cast him into a blazing inferno.

Man is not only a debtor of God, but of man, as well. Man has been enjoying all the rich heritage of human culture, civilization, education, training, breeding and scientific amenities, for ages, as a debt. What had he done to repay this huge debt he owes to human society? The only way available is to render selfless service to humans. Yes, disinterested service with body, mind and money, without expectation of any return. Lord Krishna has emphatically enjoined in Gita (3:12) that one, who cooks only for himself, is verily a thief. In fact, selfless service is the royal road to become supreme and reach the Supreme (Gita 4:31); in other words, to integrate ourselves with the Supreme. This, indeed, is the prime goal of human life. For achieving this goal, God-identification is a top priority. This is the real way for clearing all our debts and enjoying peace and plenty. Last but not least, the boon of God-knowledge bestowed on us by His Holiness the Nirankari Baba is yet another priceless debt on us. This, too, can possibly be repaid by ceaseless service to humanity and God-remembrance.

UNIVERSALISM AND WORLD PEACE

Man is admittedly the kingpin of the Universe. For aeon, he had his domicile on its soil. He has all through sought sustenance and food from the products of the universe. Nevertheless, he has seldom (exceptions apart) bothered to appreciate its essence and message. This eternal essence is known as Universalism.

The simplest definition of the universalism is boundless breadth of vision, possessed, generally, by a God-realized person or Brahm Gyani. Universalism required one to step out of his island of parochial and personal individualism and merge himself into the vast ocean of Brahmand. Brahmand, actually, means infinite expansion of consciousness that owns the entire universe. The Vedantic version of such an idealize perception is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. In this perception, all dualism is dissolved. No distance or difference exists between 'I', 'you' and 'he'. The vision of the universalist is not fragmented but holistic. This means a perspective of totality that envisions the part as the whole and vice versa.

Universalism enunciates the attitude of one for all and all for one. It is also consonant with the Advait philosophy of non-dual God, so ably elucidated by

Shankaracharya. It envisages the whole universe as monistic God - the only reality. All else is illusion.

Universalism of God

In this context, God or Brahm also broadly embraces the forces or agents of nature. These agents include the sun, the stars, the moon, the rain, the rivers, the earth, the wind, the hills, etc. Since the dawn of creation, these agents have proclaimed and unceasingly practiced the message of universalism. They have been serving man, nay all beings, without any discrimination. The principal practitioner and role model of universalism is, of course, the Almighty God. Even His detractors and atheists are generously fed, nourished and housed by Him. God's omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, too, are lighthouse - manifestations of His universalism.

Universalism of Man

As a matter of fact, man is an amusing blend of individualism and universalism. The chain of hospitals, dispensaries, laboratories, roads, canals, educational institutions, powerhouses, post and telegraph offices, orphanages and Red Cross centers set up by man in all corners of the world are standing symbols of his spirit of universalism. In the event of any country being afflicted by an emergency, disaster or calamity, all the other countries suo-moto rally together to the relief and rescue of the afflicted country. Man had also founded and organized so many international institutions and bodies like the League of Nation (now defunct), the United Nations Organization (U.N.O), the UNESCO, International Court of Justice, etc. All such institutions are man's concrete achievements in universalism. Good Samaritans, altruistic crusaders and philanthropists can be found in plenty even now. Then there are high human and ethical values evolved by man as his proud heritage. Some of these precious values are humanism, harmony, peace, love, compassion, co-operation, tolerance and God-consciousness. They are ornaments and beacon-lights of universalism.

This universalism is at once the cause and consequences of unfolding the potential divinity in man. Our holy texts also proclaim man's innate universalism. The Upanishads have it that both 'I' and 'you' are God (Aham Brahm Asmi and Tat Twam Assi). The Bible tells us that man was created in God's own image (Genesis 1:27). The Bhagwad Gita provides a splendid blueprint for universalism in the shape of three classic yogic disciplines i.e. the Gyan Yoga (Path of Knowledge), Karam Yoga (Path of Action), and the Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion).

Gross ground reality

Despite all the rosy picture of universalism and the blueprints for actualizing it, the ground reality, however, is quite gross and turbid. The first grievous blow to universalism was struck by the eldest son of our first ancestor, i.e. Adam, named Caine. He killed his own younger brother Abel out of petty jealousy. Since then, bloodshed and brutality, division and discord have been adopted by mankind as their pet pastime and guiding rule of life. War and violence on the slightest excuse were embraced by man as his standing sport and strategy. Such a sub-standard stance battered universalism and entailed perpetual anguish and agony for mankind. The Second World War alone accounted for the wanton slaughter of fifty four million humans from 1939 to 1945. During the subsequent period, 1945

to 1985, even after the establishment of the U.N.O., twenty million persons were killed in one hundred and sixty wars. This leads to the categorical conclusion that international bodies like U.N.O., created particularly for preventing wars and establishing peace, proved helpless to tame the savage tiger roaring in human heart. The partition of India in 1947 turned humans into beasts. Out of sheer communal frenzy, they butchered lakhs of their innocent brethren in that dark period.

The First Battlefield

The first and formidable theatre of all wars is, surely, the human heart. It is in this theatre that the fire of war first erupts for some reasons, real or imaginary. Thereafter it spreads like wildfire and converts peaceful fields, homes and flourishing centres of civilization into pools of blood. Imagination reels to remember the terrific toll of death and devastation wrought by Atom Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two Japanese cities during World War II.

Currently, man is awfully overwhelmed by a crippling crisis of conscience and character. The moral universe, i.e. universalism is fast degenerating. It is on to verge of collapse. Social, moral and spiritual consciousness is fading from human heart. Man has torn himself from moral moorings. The country stands disrupted even by individual civil and criminal disputes to the tune of two and half crore cases pending in various courts of India. Such disputes, obviously, rob the peace of mind of the citizens, besides involving colossal waste of their precious time. This is again due to lack of the spirit of universalism. Battlefields apart, the devils of war and violence are enacting a dreadful dance in nearly every home and habitat.

Needless to say that universalism and peace are inseparable. Both have their ultimate headquarters in human hearts. In fact, the entire edifice of human civilization, culture, art and thought is built on the firm and fine foundations of peace and love. It is direly and immediately needed to regenerate and renovate the degenerated and degraded human heart and psyche.

The Crusader of Humanism

Happily, the Nirankari Baba is currently crusading for the regeneration of moral values. His Holiness, is committed to the creation of the Kingdom of God, here and now. His mystic code carries certain novel features, which make an enduring impact on human heart. One such feature is that no discrimination is made on account of age, sex, caste, colour and creed. This means that he initiates even young children and the youth. Their hearts are deeply imbued with God-consciousness and humanism. Their hands are also trained invariably to touch and caress the feet of fellow-devotees. How can such caressing hands ever be lifted to strike or injure anyone? Another concept diffused by the Baba among his devotees is one of non-proprietorship and non-possession by man, of all worldly assets. These assets, according to the Baba, belong to the Almighty God and not to any individual. They have been bestowed on man by God simply as a trust to be utilized for human welfare.

The Nirankari Baba is verily the apostle of universalism. His basic teaching "Your God is my God" is for all. This way, the Holy Baba is determined to elevate every

man to superman. Let us take a pledge to assist the Holy Baba in this great mission.

HOW FAR IS MAN GOD'S OWN IMAGE

"Man was created in Devil's own image, not in God's, as revealed by the Bible." I was stunned by this cynical and heretical outburst of my friend. He supported his verdict by virulent wars, violence, wickedness, crime and corruption - man's agonizing achievements. As a God-conscious person, I passionately pleaded that man was certainly created in God's own image. That after being created by God, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, no doubt, and were seduced by Satan is, however, a different matter.

I explained to my friend that like God, the Supreme Creator, man, too, possesses creative faculty. If God created man, man also created so many Gods - looming large in different religions. Man also created billions of his species - all over the world. Mere physical fertilizing power cannot, however, sustain man's claim to be God's own image.

Besides man, God has to His credit several creative achievements of a splendid artist. Look at the sun, the stars, the moon, the mountains, the clouds, the rivers, the rainbow, the fragrant flowers, the butterfly, the forests, etc. Even in artistic creative pursuits, man too has a proud record. He created music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, and thus proved himself a worthy reflection of God. Some thinkers would have us believe that even the concept of the existence of God Himself was sponsored by man. Did not Voltaire, the great French philosopher, say: "Even if there were no God, one would have to be invented (say created)!"

Now look at man's creativity in the scientific realm. Aeroplanes have been able to defeat distance to an astounding measure. After taking breakfast in Srinagar, you can lunch in Kanya Kumari. By means of a telephone you can talk to people thousands of miles apart in a couple of minutes. Your T.V. set enables you in your bedroom to observe live-portraits of people, places as also hear news and views and see sports being played anywhere on the globe.

Then, the creative miracles achieved by man in the medical science can hardly be brushed aside. By equipping man with artificial limbs and transplanting human organs (even eyes), the doctors and surgeons have virtually given a new lease of life to the terminal and infirm patients.

Last but not least are the crowning achievements of man in the speculative, mystical and metaphysical realm. The ins and outs of divine identity and mystique have been unfolded by saints, seers, sages and prophets by virtue of their meditative and spiritual strides. All this stands amply illustrated in our scriptures that project the Voice of God. The evolution and elevation of man to the lofty level of Prophets and True Masters hardly leaves any room for doubt that man was created in God's own image. The True Masters have, in fact, bridged the gulf between man and his maker, i.e. God.

One vital question, however, continues to vex me. How and why, after being created in God's image, man went downhill in the lap of the devil. Here comes in

the picture the crucial question of man's breeding, education and training. It is here that man bungled. Human child, originally a Godly creature, degenerated into a devil for want of value and God-oriented education. Can the degenerate man be regenerated? By all means. The gross and perverted man can, surely, be sublimated by proper education and divine enlightenment. With all his creative achievements, man has still to go far and above to transmute himself in God's close consciousness all-around, overseeing all human activities, to make an angel even of an animal. But to be effective, we will have to catch man in his childhood. That is why the Nirankari Baba has launched child and youth spiritual assemblies to transform and sublimate their entire character and personality so that when grown up, they could confidently claim to be the images of God, if not God's own kin, and heir. Amen.

THE DEVIL AND THE DIVINE

One fine morning. I found my infant granddaughters playing joyous pranks. Suddenly, the serenity of the happy home turned into a turmoil. The younger kid planted a powerful slap on her elder sister. For quite sometime, the tranquil drawing room was converted into a violent boxing arena. The bone of contention between the two sisters was a toy robot. The parents had missed bringing two pieces. The elder sister was determined to grab the new toy exclusively for herself. The younger one could not put up with this patent injustice. The tiff between the infants induced in me a philosophic mood. The Kingdom of God, according to Christ, is people by little children. Why then, should the two children have fallen foul of each other just over a toy? Who had implanted acquisitive and aggressive impulses in their pure head and heart? Doesn't the brutish behaviour of two kids refute the truth of the dictum: Man was created in God's own image. It also made me sceptic about the wisdom of Vedantic concepts: Aham Brahma Asmi (I am God), and Tat Twan Asi (You are That-God). They sounded just like empty clichés.

Satan in human heart

How did the Satan, after all, gain entrance into the noble hearts of innocent children? I was agitated by the crucial question: "Is man inherently a devil or divine?" A close observation of human conduct and performance leads to one inevitable inference: Man, the crown of creation, is, in fact, neither wholly divine nor devilish. He is a mysterious mix of the two. At times, man soars to sublime heights of altruism and self-abnegation. Spontaneously and even unsolicited, sometimes he performs superb acts of supreme sacrifice for his fellow-men, not even his blood relations. But, by and large, even the same person behaves as a brute: his diabolical deeds drag him down to the depths of depravity and degradation.

Co-existence of good and evil

A glance at the spacious spectrum of human life, all down the ages, confirms one fundamental fact: the saint and the sinner, good and evil, have always co-existed in, as well as outside and individual. King Ravana of Sri Lanka (a demon in human form) was a contemporary of Lord Rama, the very soul of righteousness. There was Lord Krishna and his perverse maternal uncle, Kansa. Then there were the Dharamputra Yudhishtra and the wicked Duryodhana. Similar antipodes existed in all ages and they do exist even now. Even our original ancestors, Adam and Eve, were not free from the dichotomy of the Devil and the divine. The

great God had bestowed on them in the garden of Eden all possible dainties. They had even been granted immunity from disease, death, sorrow and suffering. God had in lieu of all these bounties imposed on them (Adam and Eve) only one injunction: they were to abstain from eating the forbidden fruit. It was the apple fruit, growing on the tree of knowledge. But even this solitary decree of the Almighty Creator was contravened first by Eve and then by Adam. It is immaterial whether this lapse was committed by Eve, at the instigation of Satan without, in the garb of a serpent, or by Satan within the heart of Eve. Certain divines and scholars are of the view that Eve had already fallen because of the Satan operating within her heart before the Satan outside seduced her. For violation of the divine decree, Adam and Eve had to pay a very heavy penalty. They lost their lovely paradise. They were hurled down to the earth for committing a breach of trust. They had also to forfeit their immunity from disease, death, sin and suffering.

Satan within and without

This brings us to the crucial question: Who after all created Satan within (human heart) and without? Did the great God do so? Undoubtedly, God is the only overall and original creator of all things and beings. Then Satan within and without, too, is positively the creation of the Almighty Himself. But how then does this act of God, that was apparently destructive (of man), fit in with His sublime and compassionate character? God, after all, is believed by all to be the reservoir of all righteousness. How could He stoop down to create Satan, sin and suffering for torturing mankind? Even after creating Satan, why did God give him such a long rope to play havoc even with innocent and noble folk? No satisfying answer to such capricious and arbitrary actions of Almighty is forthcoming. One thing, however, is clear enough. The struggle between good and evil, between sin and saintliness, has persisted as perpetual plague for mankind right since the dawn of creation, and will probably endure till doomsday. What has been the outcome of this classic conflict between good and evil? It must be admitted painfully that so far, the devil has scored over the divine. Vice, sin and suffering rule the roost, saints and seers notwithstanding. Milton, however, sounded an optimistic note. He regained for man the paradise lost by him. This was achieved, by man's own contrition (for his original sin) and redemptive intercession by Christ, the Son of God. But all this redemption was in the spiritual field. The Satan still scores blatantly in the secular sphere. Who then is more powerful, God or Satan?

It has already been argued that man, though created in God's own image, is a mysterious mix of the devil and the divine - the noble and ignoble. It is also a timeless truth that man is subject of the triangular pulls of free will, sin and salvation, simultaneously. Nor can it be denied that upto now, the devil has generally scored over the divine in this world of ours. A crucial question has also been posed: Whether the Satan prowling without and latent within man, was also the creation of the Creator Himself? If so, whether this venture of God is consonant with His sublimity and sanctity? Further: Why such a long rope to Satan to work havoc with human society and civilization? These are fundamental, metaphysical and ethical enigmas that are difficult to answer.

Human animal

The ambiguity implicit in the human animal (or angel) has evoked opposite reactions from different seers and scholars. In Hamlet, Shakespeare said: What

a piece of work is man how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god, the beauty of the world, and yet to me quintessence of dust, man delights not me. Manu, the ancient seer and jurist of India, opined that normally it is very rare for the common man to act righteously. His first tendency is to commit sin.

Origin of evil

Why does, man commit sin, though believed to carry the stamp of God's own image? This paradox needs explanation. God is supposed to be the paragon of all purity, power and freedom. As an image of the Almighty, man, too, has naturally been endowed with or delegated by God, all His attributes, including power of free-will. Logically, such a delegated power and privilege carries with it the discretion to do good or to commit sin. Thus, it is wrong to malign God for implanting sin or Satan in human heart, particularly because the lure of sin *prima facie* looks so lovely. Another pertinent question: Why doesn't the Almighty intervene in time, when man, His favourite creature, goes off the rails? The first impediment for God to intervene is, of course, His own delegation of authority of free will to man. Secondly, God reigns like a constitutional head; He does not rule. The powers of declaring a state of emergency and taking over all administration in His own hands, no doubt, vests in God, to cope with abnormal conditions. But such powers are exercised very sparingly by God. Obviously, God had granted full autonomy to man, His replica, to fashion his own career, conduct and destiny. The powers of imposing punitive retribution on man in the final reckoning, for his sins, are no doubt reserved by God with Himself, in the form of Karma Charka (Law of Cause and Effect). For accomplishing this ultimate target, God any incarnate Himself on earth, as visualized in Gita (4:1):

Whenever righteousness declines and sin reigns supreme in the world, I descend in human form to wipe off the wicked, and to redeem the righteous.

Free-will

Here an important question crops up: Why should man, the peak of creation, exercise his free will arbitrarily? Why does he commit vile sins to the detriment of his fellow-creatures and thus cause them unnecessary suffering? Equity and ethics demand that exercise of free-will by man should be regulated, in consonance with divine norms, and higher consciousness, becoming of the divine origin of man. But there is the eternal gulf between code and conduct. Here comes the role of education, ethical and metaphysical, to be enforced by the state, society, seers and statesmen for imparting enlightenment to the human stuff. Only then, will man exercise his free-will like an angel, becoming of the dignity of God Himself Milton told us in *Paradise Lost*, in Book III.

I formed them (Adam and Eve) free and free they must remain, till they enthrall themselves, I else must change.

In letting loose Satan around man, God also wanted to test the steadfastness and integrity of man, His highest creation, when faced with temptation.

Eve's disobedience of God in eating the forbidden apple fruit under the instigation of Satan and the resultant fall of the couple from the Garden of Eden to the earth was not an unmixed evil after all. Through their fall, Adam and Eve

attained full consciousness of their free-will - independent potential and personality. After disobeying God, man marched towards his self-discovery, self-fulfillment and ultimately self-realization and redemption.

It will be recalled that, originally, Satan was a prominent angel in the Court of God. He could not, however, stand the absolute autocracy and 'irrational' rule of God. He, accordingly, raised the standard of revolt against God. Reeling under the relentless attacks of adverse and undeserved calamities, even an aggrieved individual, in utter frustration, at times, curses and challenges God! The incursions on man by Satan from without become fruitful only when man welcomes them willfully from within, in the exercise of his free will. Environment, too, has its impact in polluting human mind. But, as already stated, all-pervasive education in higher values is the best answer against the attacks of Satan from without and within.

No appreciation of good without evil

Sin and evil may be justified from another angle, as well. Evil is, inevitably, the offspring of exercise of free will. But the existence and possibility of evil can't be visualized without the existence and possibility of the existence of good. In other words, the intrinsic superior merit of good cannot be appreciated except in the background of demerit of evil, by contrast.

Why should Satan be given such a long rope to bruise and batter the innocent and the noble? Why would not God curb and kill the Satan in time? Why should faith of the noble people in the justice of God be eroded because of the long lease enjoyed by the Satan? The explanation for this moral and metaphysical dilemma is to be found in the clemency and compassion of the Creator. God wants to elevate every member of His creation, including the Satan to perfection and redemption, ultimately. This consummation can be brought about by man's own repentance and his personal resolve for regeneration. The light imparted by the True Masters, coupled with God's grace, has also an important role in uplifting man.

The living and contemporary True Master, who can sublimate Satans into saints, is the Nirankari Baba. He is waging a massive crusade of divine communion and consciousness for curing the spiritual myopia even of the stinking sinners. His magic Mantra (Word) for regenerating the fallen man, like that of Jesus, is "Love thy Lord and thy neighbour." Let man realize that he is after all, a finite creature, an image, and has to seek his strength from his original, infinitude of God. Man must surrender to Him and His decrees. Only then can he regain the Paradise Lost. Will he?

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

Yet another Christmas has come and gone. The New Year, too, has dawned. Does the Merry Christmas simply means "Eat, drink, dress glamorously and be merry?" Is it merely a day of display of fun, festivity, feast, finery, cakes, cabarets and exchange of toys and gifts? Or, is the Christmas Day identified by pealing of bells from illuminated churches, their midnight services and merry carols? All this is no more than the external façade of Christmas. What then is the inner spirit of Christmas?

I got an answer to this ticklish question when I attended the Christmas day service of the local Roman Catholic Church. Jesus Christ was born on this day at Bethlehem. The prophetic words of the Bishop are still vibrant in my ears, head and heart: "Has Christ incarnated in your hearts, O saints? By incarnation I mean birth of Christ and Christian ethos in your heads and hearts. Has Jesus made his home in your homes? We Christians have been celebrating Christmas for some two thousand years with so much fanfare. But can you say confidently that Jesus had actually incarnated in your hearts and he is happy to be domiciled there? If not, why?"

Crucial question

These meaningful and metaphysical questions chilled my spine. I felt a powerful jolt in my entire frame. Can I say that the contemporary Jesus, i.e. the Nirankari Baba has incarnated in my heart? I cannot but hang my head down. I have to say "No" and plead guilty. I may be excused if I say that here "I" symbolizes the so-called devotee - a common Christian or a Nirankari. For, I hold all faiths and religions as the same cosmic ray of light, despite the diversity of their labels. Needless to say that the above mentioned crucial questions raised by the Bishop are not routine and superficial queries. They form the bedrock and bastion of Ultimate Truth and Absolute Reality. By these questions, the Bishop wanted to verify whether the Christian spirit and values have permeated our hearts and guide our day-to-day conduct.

Christian vision and values

What, after all, are the Christian vision and values? The towering Christian value is, of course, Love - love for the Lord, love for His creation (our neighbour) and love even for one's enemies. Then come the concomitant traits of compassion, magnanimity, non-violence and freedom from hunger (physical and spiritual). - Be thou perfect, as thy Father in heaven is." This is Christ's clarion call for inner development and excellence. By imbibing these values we become eligible, says Christ, to become denizens of the Kingdom of God, where there is all bliss and beatitude forever.

Christ, himself of poor stock (a carpenter), further enjoined that these values should be practised by us in everyday life. We must feed the hungry, help and heal the sick and extend genuine solace to the oppressed and distressed in every possible way. His concept of sonship of God for every human naturally establishes a bond of universal brotherhood among the human race. He had a message of liberation for one and all, particularly for the small fry. He threw open the gates of heaven to the poor and, virtually, closed them for the arrogant rich.

In his famous "Sermon on the Mount", Jesus significantly recites his values of life in a nutshell. In this Sermon, he catalogues the type of persons who bag the blessings of God:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they, which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they, which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Bible (Matthew 5:3 - 12)

Thus Christmas is, actually, a day of soul communion and sublimation for efflorescence of the Christian values. Christmas, actually, begins where festivities end. I believe every Gursikh (disciple) or a Gurmukh (devotee) is a Christian.

Happy New Year

The first New Year (of Christian era) started on first January of the first year, about a week after the birth of Jesus Christ. The spirit and the significance of the New Year, actually, is to renew ourselves, our personality and values, so as to be worthy followers of Jesus Christ. Let our old Adam self) die on the dawn of the New Year, so that we must have a new birth with purity and righteousness. We must leave the world better than we found it.

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