

KEY TO UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

Man was born free but everywhere he is in chains.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The above statement of Rousseau, though made in a political context, aptly describes man's state in other spheres too. Cool thinking will convince any rational mind that restraints are indispensable not only for civilization and progress of human society, but also for our very existence. Imagine for a moment the chaotic state of affairs, arising out of people not observing even ordinary traffic regulations, or not reporting for duty in time, or not honouring the commitments made. We know that vitamins are vital for the health and growth of any organism. Nevertheless, their excessive intake positively impairs our health. In the like manner, though excessive restraints are sure to stifle social health, some restraints are imperative, if not inevitable. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it is the restraints which check the society from relapsing into the state of savagery and barbarity.

The foregoing analysis concerns the physical man. But is man a mere physical man. But is man a mere physical entity? As we all know, it is not so: man also enshrines in himself something more vital i.e. the soul. We call it the very life-energy that activates the otherwise inert physical body. A radio set in perfect order is dead without the soul, a body, even in the best of form, is simply a mass of flees, bones and blood. This life-energy is no mechanical: it is a conscious and dynamic energy, which not only sustains but also regulates the whole human system. This consciousness is sleeping in plants, walking in animals, but awake in man. Therefore, of all the creation, man is not only highly conscious but also self-conscious. And, this distinct characteristic enables man to satisfy his soul's sole and inherent yearning to realize its true identity, known as Self-Realization or God-Realization. And, this is possible only in the human life. As against the physical, it is the divine in man, which is always free of the physical bonds.

Let us now scan the main characteristics of the physical or the body, and to the divine or the soul, in man. We all know that whatever is physical or material, is always finite, subject to change and ultimately perishes, while the soul, being of the nature of the Supreme Soul, infinite, immutable and eternal; it transcends all limitations. Further, the body has a form, but the soul is formless. Again, the soul is not subject to physical laws, whereas the body is. This makes it crystal clear that what is really important is the soul, which is above all physical limitations.

As already said, the soul's inherent quest is to realize its origin, the Supreme Soul. Contrary to this, the demands of the body are material. Isn't it, therefore, an irony that instead of realizing the Supreme Soul (Param Atma), we should spend our entire life in material pursuits ! We go a step further and even make the

physical factors the very basis of dividing humanity into narrow sects, creeds, faiths, etc., each claiming to be the only true and supreme one. The impenetrable barriers raised due to the ignorance of the basic teachings of religion are the real cause of mutual hatred, ill-will, jealousy, narrow-mindedness, etc. Let us examine the factors, which, for want of right perception, are eating into the very vitals of the society, and how Universal Brotherhood can be promoted through their rational understanding.

Material Possessions

At heart, almost everyone feels that material possessions are intrinsically transitory. It is amazing, therefore, why in actual practice, man is blindly racing for their exclusive possession. This ravenous craving brings forth endless troubles, for there is no end to such a race. We all know that when we get one thing, we aspire for another, and on getting the same, we crave for yet another, and so on till the very end of our life. On the other hand, a man with a divine vision and wisdom takes everything, including his own being, as a sacred trust of the Supreme Master, who can take back any or all of these, at any moment. Conscious of his obligations as a trustee, and also fully alive to the transitory nature of these possessions, an enlightened being is neither puffed up by their possession, nor their absence or deprivation make him dejected. Though he enjoys the bounties of God, as others do he is free from their attachment. He, accordingly, faces every situation and its consequences, to the best of his ability, not only cheerfully but also thankfully. He is not jealous of those who are ahead of him in material prosperity. Similarly, he does not look down upon those who are still lagging behind, rather he prays for their well-being also. It inculcates in him an attitude of detachment and humility. Persons with such a disposition rise above the distinction between high and low, rich and poor, and contribute to the development of a harmonious society, free of arrogance and hatred, ill-will and jealousy.

Race

Racial prejudice is another factor responsible for the division of humanity, though race merely denotes descendants of common ancestry. At times, such a prejudice touched so high a pitch that it worked up passions, generated hatred and, finally, sparked off bloody wars for the extinction of one race at the hands of another. Some races considered people belonging to other races as inferior beings, and assigned to themselves the sacred duty not only to exploit but also subject them (other races) to social, political and even religious subjugation and persecution. History bears ample testimony to such a perverted mentality.

In our own time, Adolf Hitler himself on being an Aryan and therefore considered himself to be superior, destined to rule others! His brutal persecution of the Jews, on the count, robbed him of reason. Thus, he poisoned the German mind with intense hatred for the Jews, dubbing them as not only inferior but also despicable beings. The very word "Jew" became so hateful that no exception was made even in the case of distinguished Jew scientists, philosophers, scholars, theologians, literature, geniuses, medicos, musicians or artists. In such an atmosphere, surcharged with bigotry, it was natural for the Germans to consider

extinction of the Jews as a sacred task. Accordingly, Hitler regimented the Germans, the superior Aryans' ,and inflicted untold and inhuman sufferings, miseries and tortures upon the innocent Jews, men, women and children, and put millions of them to death. In the circumstances, what is not understood is, how the German mind resolved the flaring contradiction between hatred and prejudice for the inferior Jews' ,on the one hand, and acceptance of Lord Jesus Christ, a Jew and a symbol of peace and non-violence, as their prophet, on the other.

It is really a matter of profound regret and misfortune that we should be completely swayed by narrow racial prejudice and stoop so low as not to perceive the man in others. It is high time to pause and pose to ourselves the questions:

- Is race a valid criterion for anyone to be considered and treated as an inferior or superior beings?

-Is it not a fact that there have always been saints, sages, seers, messengers, prophets, philosophers, thinkers, scholars and pioneers, in several fields, belongings to different races, for whom the very word "race" is not only meaningless but also repugnant?

Caste and Colour

Caste prejudice, which is quite common especially in the East, is responsible in a big way for driving a wedge between man and man. Coming to our own sub-continent, caste prejudice has acquired such a firm hold on our mind that there is a hierarchy of castes and sub-castes even amongst the people professing the same religion. This, in turn, sets in motion a chain-reaction of social and religious prejudices:the higher castes looking down upon the lower ones and consequent mutual ill will and hatred.

But the worst is, that caste prejudice has been responsible for reducing millions of our brethren to sub-human level. They were denied social justice. In actual practice, they had no human rights worth the name. Perhaps for this reason, they were entrusted with all odd, menial and repugnant jobs, which the higher castes would not even think of performing.

Saints like Namdev, a calico-printer, Ravidass, a cobbler, Sadana, a butcher, kabir, a weaver, Valmiki, a dacoit and sain, a barber, all belonging to the low castes, occupy a place of honour in the religious realm: their psalms and hymns are enshrined in the holy books and scriptures and are recited reverently and sung devotionally, yet persons of low castes in general were considered as untouchable and treated as such even in the religious sphere, so much so that their entry in the very Homes of God ---places of worships---- was considered to be a sacrilege. They were considered to have been destined to exist simply to serve the higher castes and to suffer. On short, poverty and deprivation was their food' ,abuse their fruit, serving the higher castes their lot and suffering their badge. What a pity!

It may come as a surprise, perhaps a rude shock, to some, that the caste system, attributed to Sage Manu, was not what it is today. What Manu actually enunciated was simply a classification of the people as per their respective vocations. It was, thus, a purely vocational division, based on the principle of division of labour, that is:

Brahman :Their field was science, medicine, education and other intellectual and religious persist.

Kshatriya :They were ruling and warrior class, responsible for the maintenance of law and order, and defence of the country.

Vaisha :They were a class of entrepreneurs, looking after agriculture, industry, trade and commerce.

Shudras :This was the category of artisans, craftsmen, workers, etc., for serving the society.

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The sole aim of this division was that according to one's merits and performance, one should be assigned a duty, for which one was most suited, to contribute one's best for the general good of the society as a whole. Precisely, for this very reason, according to Manu, a person born in a Shudra family, but possessing talent, caliber and culture of Brahmana, Kshatriya or Vaisha could be elevated as a Brahmana, a Kshatriya or Vasiha, as the case may be. Similarly, a person born in a higher caste, but lacking the requisite capabilities of Brahmana, Kshatriya or Vaisha, became a Shudra. It will be interesting to note here that even in the same family, its members could belong to these four different classes.

However, with the passage of time, the vested interests, who held privileged positions, changed the very pattern of this classification and reduced it to the prevailing caste system: birth, instead of worth, became the basis of one's caste, without any regard for one's skill and talent. Gradually, it became an irrevocable and watertight division, giving rise to mutual bickering, hatred, even strife.

Position in regard to colour prejudice is no less horrifying , though we very well know that (human) complexion is beyond human control. The late victim of the same was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Negro pacifist. It is an irony that the sane and inspiring voice of the one, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and Nehru Award for International Understanding for his dedication to the cause of non-violence and human equality, who fought for human dignity and self-respect, and brought about a new awakening among the neglected and the oppressed, simply on account of their complexion, kindling a fresh hope in the hearts of millions of colored people, was silenced by a bullet. His cold-blooded murder came as arid shock to all humanity. It was, infuse, a murder of the conscience of mankind!

Is it not unfortunate that we do not pause and question ourselves:

- Is man to be judged simply by the colour of his skin?

-Who has bestowed upon a person, with a particular complexion, the power to arrogate to himself the right to treat others with different skin colour, with scorn and contempt?

-Did not Ghalib and Tagore, the renowned poets, Paul Robinson, the golden voice Negro singer, Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, Lumumba, the patriot, Ramanujam, the mathematician, Jagdish Chander Bose, the scientist, Aurobindo Ghose, the Yogi, Buddha, the Compassionate, Vivekanand, the patriot-saint and a galaxy of savants, saints sages, seers, belongs to coloured races and yet left and indelible imprint on human history?

-Does man cease to be man simply because he is born to parents labeled as low caste, even though he be a great man?

-should one's caste determine the type of treatment one deserves?

-Is it not a fact that the society's existence as also its peace, progress and prosperity, rest upon the corporate performance of its members, each contributing his mite?

Diet & Dress

It is our daily experience to notice persons holding strong, rather inflexible views, in matters regarding food. For instance, there are persons who will not take anything which contains onion, but will be freely taking garlic. For others, the very smell of garlic is repugnant, though onion may be an ingredient of their daily diet. Even for some amongst the non-vegetarians, the meat of a certain bird or animal, may be a social or religious taboo. Similar is the case with respect to hard and soft drinks. There are some who love to take coffee, whereas for others the same is unsavory. Again, there are persons who crave for things sweet, while others prefer salty ones. It would be all right if such preferences and prejudices were confined to oneself, but the misfortune is that each individual concedes his own choice as the only right one. And, perhaps under such an illusion, each is tempted as a matter of sacred duty, to impose the same upon others for their good as if others are dumb driven cattle, with no choice or opinion of their own. Obviously, such a rigid attitude is sure to be resented and reacted to by others, if not with more, atleast with equal vehemence. This in turn gives rise to mutual conflict tension and violence.

As in the case of diet, we also hold rigid views in matters of dress and life-style, harbor prejudice and make others an object of ridicule. We even pour scorn upon those who differ with us in their mode of living and dressing.

It hardly needs to be pointed out that our diet and mode of dressing and living depend primarily upon geographical and climatic conditions, which differ, sometimes quite sharply from region to region, even in the same country. This explains the variation and varieties of crops produced even in the same region or country. For example, wheat is produced in abundance in North India, whereas in

the South, the soil and climate are conducive for rice. As such, it is natural that the people in the North to have wheat as their staple diet while those in the South to take rice. This also explains the peasant surprise with which we may be greeted if, while in Europe, we ask for water to drink, because there, beer is usually served as a substitute for drinking water!

People living in cold regions, apart from requiring food rich in proteins also need woolen clothes, while for those living in hot regions, cotton clothes and food containing carbohydrates are ideally suited. In fact, even amongst the varieties that are available, what one actually eats drinks or wears, is purely a matter of one's choice and preference. Besides the same also depends upon one's constitution and temperament. Hence the proverb: What is meat for one may be poison for another. Since these factors vary from place to place it is not prudent to thrust our choice upon others, or even think that those who take a particular type of dress, are doomed. Above all, such factors have nothing to do with God-Realization, which is the craving of the soul. Such a Realization is bound to remove much of the prevailing hatred and bitterness amongst different people.

Normal Life

The vested interests, more especially the priestly class, have been able, through centuries of preaching, to ingrain in us a strong misgiving that God-realization is not possible so long as one does not break the bondage of worldly affairs. They further contend that the material world has no charm for the one who has attained God-realization. In other words, one should give up one's material possessions and craving therefor and retire to far-off mountains, caves or jungles, for the realization of God, though He is believed and pronounced to be all-pervading, and, in support, they advance several arguments, and even give a distorted interpretation of the scriptures to suit their design. There is nothing surprising in what they preach, because they very well understand how difficult, may be impossible, it is to renounce the material world, to which they themselves cling fast! The innocent people, no doubt, derive a momentary satisfaction from their sermons, but in their helplessness and self-pity, they resort to the next best course, that is performance of rites and rituals, preached and prescribed, as a means to God-realization. In this way, the vested interest achieves their aim to strengthen their hold over the devotees and keep them yoked to the wheel of rites and rituals, in the hope of God-realization, which actually remains a far cry for them. What is strange is that we should become totally oblivious of the stark fact that the Great Masters like Rama, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, Nanak, Kabir and Ramakrishna, to name a few, whom we revere and accept as our Spiritual Guides, were themselves householders, and give the pride of place to family life. Evidently, they never wanted us to become parasites, and thereby be a burden on the society. On the other hand, we daily see the so-called saints and sadhus, going around in the (material) world, which they are supposed to have renounced for the sake of God-realization, and knocking at the doors of the householders, whose life they described as low and impeding God-realization!

If Saints Kabir, Ravidass and others could attain God-realization and, at the same time, lead a normal life, why cannot we? Renunciation of the normal (family) life in the name of God-realization, has been responsible for creating an

army of parasites and disrupting happy homes. Renunciation of family life, as is generally advocated, can at best be a self-deception, but certainly not a precondition for God-realization. Contrary to this, God-realization makes man an awakened being. Such a being does not shirk his domestic and social duties and obligations, rather he discharge the same conscientiously with a redoubled zeal.

Religion

In general, religion means faith in an unseen higher controlling power, coupled with an upright moral and ethical conduct. Thus, religion has tow aspects: social and spiritual. We cannot rule out variation in the social aspect, because it depends upon several factors such as habits, customs, traditions, culture, climatic and geographical conditions. This also explains the differences amongst religion and, for that matter, the existence of a variety of 'eligious'.

However, this is not the case with the spiritual aspect, as it is directly related to the spirit, which is one and the same in all human beings, without any distinction whatsoever. It is in this sense that the true saints, seers, divine messengers and prophets proclaim with one voice that there is by One God, One Race and One religion's such, the cardinal objective of all religions is to inspire man to translate his belief into realization of the One, i.e. the supreme, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, all-pervading, eternal, changeless and, above all, formless God, and to lead a virtuous and pious life to enjoy the supreme bliss, as also to promote peace, amity and harmony. All scriptures teach that we are children of the same Supreme Father and, therefore, should love, respect and treat each other as equal, irrespective of whether one is high or low, rich or poor, weak or strong, black or white, pious or sinner. No doubt, the religious preachers also preach this gospel and the faithful profess the same, but they do so more in theory than in practice.

Since various religions came into being at different times, the Great Masters of the time, who introduced the seekers to the all-pervading God, also laid down certain guidelines for fostering, no doubt, were in keeping with the local environment and level of understanding of the people, yet the underlying principle was universal in its appeal and application. However, in course of time, the vested interests, who were devoid of the knowledge of the Divine, but at the helm of affairs, reduced these guidelines to dogmas and made these the very foundation of religion. The followers were required to adhere to the same rigidly as a matter of faith. Therefore, there was not and, for that matter, there could not be a dead uniformity amongst different religions. Even then, in essence, all the religions are one, and so is the goal, that is Salvation. However, the irony is that, in actual practice, appearance or maintenance of the body in a particular fashion, or observance of set practices, without any regard to the fundamentals of the religion one inherits', is regarded as religion. since conformity to the physical pattern has become all-important, we feel gravely concerned and agitated at any departure from the same. This, at times, even inflames communal passions.

Religion has further been divided and sub-divided into sects and groups, and reduced to set routines and practices rites and ritual, signs and symbols, logic feats, reading and recitation of the holy books and scriptures, worship of idols

and various manifestations of the creation, right from an ant to the sun, instead of the Creator Himself. It will be interesting to note that every such routine is presented as a means to God-realization, which can actually be attained only through the True Master of the day; there is no substitute for God-realization. However, rituals have taken such a strong hold of our mind that we have totally forgotten God. What a Fall! That is why we act contrary to what is ordained and preached in the scriptures. We consider ourselves as superior simply because we happen to belong to a particular religion, and make it the basis of our dealing with others: we look down upon other faiths and treat their followers as inferior beings. Consumed by the communal frenzy, we even hate people remembering God by a different name. Such a negative approach and biased thinking is responsible for mutual hatred, tension, communal riots, religious crusades and even wars, claiming countless precious human lives. Mass massacres of the young and old, men, women, and children, witnessed in the wake of the partition of India, are quite fresh in our memory. It was the direct result of perverted communal mentality, putting a big question mark on religion, a matter of grave concern and challenge to every man of faith.

It is high time to realize that God being one and universal, cannot be aligned with any particular religion, and that in the eyes of Divine Father, people of all faiths as well as the atheists, are equal and alike and worthy of our love, respect and regard. We should further bear in mind that like us, others also love and revere and religion they profess, and derive solace from the same. Therefore, if we are true to our own religion, it cannot, rather it should not infuse in us a sense of false pride to look down upon other religions or harbor ill-will, malice, jealousy, etc. for their followers or those who have no faith in religion. On the other, religion should instill in us rationality instead of bigotry, understanding instead of fanaticism, enabling us not only to distinguish but also sift religion from the debris of crass superstitions, make-beliefs, rites and rituals, which in course of time, have become to be regarded as the religion by the devotees and presented as such by the vested interests.

God-realization act as a cementing force, inspiring love, amity, fellow-feeling, humility and self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and selfless service, and inspire us to be compassionate, open-minded and large hearted enough to understand and appreciate others view-points, as also to respect and honour all, whatever their faith and belief may be.

Scriptures

There are several misconceptions about the scriptures, reverently called Holy Books by men of faith. People appear to harbor a wrong and rigid notion that the scriptures, which they revere and follow, are the only gospel truth. The reason for such a biased attitude appears to be that, generally, either they have not studied other scriptures, or they do not follow the spirit behind the letter. This has been, indeed, one of the major causes for a great deal of misunderstanding, leading to communal and racial tension between the followers of different religious groups.

As a matter of fact, the scriptures are the written record of the realisation and personal mystic experiences of saints, sages, seers and prophets, which show the path to attaining the same sublime state. These are compiled either during the lifetime of the Great Masters, or after they have cast off their mortal coil. These also, generally, enshrine a code of conduct for an upright living and imbibing ethical, moral and spiritual values.

There could not be an exact identity amongst different scriptures because, in the first instance, the Enlightened Beings appeared at different circumstances and in different situations. For this reason, they had to advance different arguments, narrate different parables cite different similes, depending upon the level of understanding of the people, their culture, habits, customs, traditions, beliefs, local environment and geographical conditions, to convey the Message. As such, one should not be swayed by the letter of the scriptures, but try to catch and follow the spirit behind.

For example, we know that keeping a fast is beneficial for the mental and physical health of a person. It may also be resorted to tide over food scarcity. Again, it bestows upon one endurance to whitest and hunger when such an occasion arises, as also the capacity to adapt oneself to local conditions. It also provides an opportunity to introspect, to contemplate on the Supreme Creator to bring ourselves close to the Divine, as also to dive deep into His creation to unravel the mysteries of Nature for the benefit of mankind. Further, it is a preliminary step to self-control to overcome human temptations and weaknesses such as lust, anger, attachment, greed, pride, ill-will, jealousy and hatred. Above all, one may keep fast as an act of penance, self-purification, self-elevation and self-sublimation, or to experience the pangs of hunger to realize the sufferings of those who have to go without food. This, in turn, inculcates in one humility and moderation, and inspires one to be compassionate and charitable. But if one does not regulate and sublimate one's conduct and imbibe higher values, mere fasting is of little avail. As such, all faiths eloquently exhort that keeping of a fast is a means and not an end in itself. It is perhaps for this reason that the Enlightened Beings were not rigid as to how such a fast should be broken. For instance, to break the Ramzan fast, date was naturally chosen for the obvious reason that it was the cheapest eatable in Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, though anything like juice, or even plain water, could serve the purpose. However, in India, due to wide varieties of soil and climatic conditions, water, which has always been abundantly available and locally produced fruit, grain, etc., which were within the reach of the common man, were taken to break a fast. Nevertheless, despite all such apparent differences, all the scriptures are unanimous so far as the spirit behind fasting is concerned.

On the basis of our day-to-day experience we know, that similarity, if any, in medical books, written by different authors, in different periods and even in different languages, can be discerned only by a physician, of the simple reason that he is the person, who is conversant with the medical science. Likewise, only a God-realized being knows and can pronounce that notwithstanding the apparent differences, the spiritual essence of various scriptures is the same for the simple reason that all these point to ONE. It is again for this reason that God-realized beings never discriminate between one scripture and another.

Again, a non-medico may keep with him medical books and take utmost, rather reverential care of the same, yet he cannot be benefited by these. A physician, on the other hand, can take full advantage of such books for himself as well as for others. So is the case with God-realized beings, who actually know and follow the substance and essence of the scriptures, and are fully alive to the truth that the scriptures are a means to realize Truth, but not Truth in themselves. As such, they assert that not mere recitation or conventional adoration, but an objective and thoughtful study of and, above all, living up to their teachings, constitutes the real veneration of the scriptures and of the Great Masters. It will, therefore, not be an exaggeration to say that persons with the knowledge and realization of God, are the true adherents of the Holy Books.

True Master

The True Master or Satguru holds a pivotal position in the spiritual realm. However, as in the case of scriptures, there is many a misconception about the True Master also. It is therefore, imperative to know the true mark of a True Master.

It is our daily experience, that people take a person in rags, or smeared with ashes, or attired in a particular fashion, to be a saint. It is perhaps for this reason that, at all times, there have been quite a large number of persons, posing themselves as saints, messengers and prophets.

We well know that a person possessing medical knowledge is known as a physician. For the patient it is only the knowledge that matters, whatever may be the cast, colour, religion or nationality of the physician. However, if the physician's own son is deficient in mathematics, his knowledge of medicine is of no avail; he is unable to make up his son's deficiency in mathematics. Again a judge's son can attain such a high position only if he acquires the legal knowledge. The hallmark of a teacher, physician or a judge, therefore, is not his attire, caste, colour or lineage, but his knowledge, which transcends all limitations of status, colour, race and nationality. In fact, knowledge is the real physician, the teacher, the judge or the True Master.

Since knowledge can be imparted and acquired through the medium of a tangible or physical being, we identify knowledge with the apparent source, that is, the physical being. This explains why we address Mr. Peter, after he has acquired the knowledge of medicine as Doctor Peter, and even after his death, he is remembered as Doctor Peter.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the one, who is God-realized and can bestow God-knowledge, is the Satguru or True Master. The seeker is concerned with the knowledge, and not with the caste, colour, creed, race or nationality of the True Master. By imparting God-knowledge, the True Master makes the seeker realize his real self. This is a turning-point in his life, which brings about a radical change in his way of thinking and attitude towards life. He is now blessed with a new awakening, a new vision. This in turn, brings poise, peace and bliss to his disturbed and agitated mind.

As already discussed, human beings differ from one another in their diet, dress, temperament, likes and dislikes, life-style, etc. In fact, these are one's personal concerns, as everyone desires to maintain his individuality. As such, there was never, nor there shall ever be a dead uniformity in such matters.

The True Master is fully alive to this fact. He accepts diversity as something natural, so far as the life-style and culture of the people are concerned, but firmly believes in the unity of the spirit. And, for a harmonious synthesis between these two, the True Master adopts the path of golden mean and fervently works for unity in diversity, as is the case with a musician, who produces a sweet symphony out of different instruments, each emitting a different note. Accordingly, the True Master knits together the flowers of different shades, peculiar fragrances, diverse shapes and sizes, with the thread of love, humility, tolerance and compassion, in an all-embracing necklace of Brotherhood. Further, for the True Master, all saints, seers, sages, savants, messengers and prophets are worthy of equal and deep reverence. Also, he does not believe in religious conversion, but in spiritual transformation. And this he brings about not through rites and rituals but through spiritual enlightenment, by establishing a direct and abiding communion between the seeker and the sought i.e. God. This sounds to be a time-consuming process, but it is not so. We all accept that

God is all-pervading and omnipresent. therefore, as stated in all the holy books and scriptures a mere hint by the True Master is sufficient to integrate the aspirant with God. And from that very moment, one begins to perceive Him here, there and everywhere! In reality, it is the hallmark of a True Master to establish a direct and an abiding communion between the aspirant and the Lord.

It will be relevant to mention here that the people at large are enchanted more by occult powers and miracles than by God-knowledge, and regard the former, and not the latter, as the mark of a True Master.

Let us again go back to the example of the physician. apparently, the cure is the repute of the physician, but, in reality, it is his medical knowledge which is the real power behind his medical miracles. The scriptures, especially the words of the True Master of the day, always attach primary importance to the spiritual realization, rather than to the physical miracles. Unless we appreciate the spirit of the scriptures in this background, the letter may lead us astray.

There are people who worship a True Master as the Son of God. Here again they seem to ignore the spiritual aspect. We all know that the Great Masters bestowed spiritual realization upon the followers, and those who imbibed their teachings, became a spiritual child. This is how the spiritual progeny is born and abides. It is in this sense that a spiritual child or True Master is known as the Son of God.

Whenever God manifests Himself in a person in spirit, --- his real self---, he is known as a Prophet or Messenger, or Saint, or True Master or Son of God. We also call him God-incarnate. Here we should neither be scared of nor misled by the word "incarnate". It simply means a human being as an embodiment of divine attributes such as Love, Light and wisdom; Truth, Goodness and Beauty. It is entirely a spiritual manifestation and not a physical transformation. He, no doubt

is a physical being like others, but has an expanded personality so as to embrace all, regardless of caste, colour, creed, faith, past, antecedents, etc., for his sole concern is the elevation and sublimation of the fellow-creatures. He is an illumined mind. With the light of knowledge, he dispels the darkness of ignorance, misconceptions, superstitions, dogmas, rites and rituals, and blesses the devotees with the Holy communion or spiritual Awakening. Thus, he sets free the devotees from such bondage, as also from the cycle or repeated births and deaths. It is for this reason that the True Master is also called the Bondage-breaker.

The True-Master is also known as the Divine Messenger. We all know that a messenger is one who carries a message to the intended person. What is important is the safe and correct delivery of the message and not the appearance of the messenger or his diet, dress or culture. Similarly, one who conveys or delivers the Divine Message is the Divine Messenger. Since the Divine is eternal, it necessarily implies that the Divine Message is also eternal, and so is the Divine Messenger or the True Master, manifesting at different times and in different places, to convey the Divine Message.

Key

By now it will be amply clear that factors such as material possessions, diet, dress, mode of living, caste, colour, creed, race, nationality, etc. have been responsible for generating false pride, malice, hatred, jealousy, ill-will, tension, strife and even bloodshed. Also, we have seen that when dispassionately and objectively analyzed, these factors are, in reality, not divisive factors, but these do become divisive and breed antagonism when we fail to exercise restraint and tolerance or when we take into consideration only the physical aspect of man. Swayed by such factors, we totally forget that neither there was nor there can be a dead uniformity in such matters even amongst members in the same family, not to speak of mankind as a whole. We further forget that had God Almighty so wished, in the entire world, there would have been only one type of soil, climate, produce and food, as also people with the same likes and dislikes, temperament, perception complexion, size and even one religion or faith. The very fact that in the creation there are countless varieties in every sphere, should bring home the truth that dead uniformity was never ordained, nor even intended by the Supreme Lord. Should we, therefore, not pose to ourselves the vital question: Is man, an insignificant creature, mightier than the Almighty God to undo what He has ordained? Obviously, the answer is 'No'. However, in view of the divisive and destructive role played by such factors, we are confronted with yet another pertinent question: Is humanity doomed to disintegration at the hands of such factors? The answer is again 'No'. Because man is not what he appears to be: he is not a mere physical entity; there is also the divine in man--spirit--, which is much more vital than the physical. This in fact, is the real man. It is this man which is said to be the image of God. the moment one sees this man a transmutation takes place in one's perception: man no longer remains a finite individual; identifying himself with the Universal Father, he evolves into a universal being, a member of the universal family. Accordingly, his physical form, along with all its attributes, pales into insignificance, and he is sublimated into a spirit, that he really is ! This is spirituality, pure and simple.

All that is required to be done is that we should see this man. this consumption is possible only when we are directly introduced to the Supreme Father the all-pervading Formless, through the benevolence and grace of the True Master of the day, regardless of our caste, colour, creed, religion, antecedent, diet, dress, language, status, community, nationality and the sort.

To our great good luck, Sant Nirankari Mission, under the divine and benign guidance of the Nirankari Baba, is dedicated to this noble and sacred task of disseminating knowledge of the omnipresent, all pervading and formless god, and fostering unity in diversity- the key to universal brotherhood. To this end, the Mission has also propounded five rational tenets, which may be stated as follows:

- * All assets, physical, mental and material, are gifts and trust of God and should be regarded as such.
- * Caste, colour or creed should not be a cause for pride, arrogance and egoism.
- * Diet, dress and life-style should not be a cause of hatred and intolerance.
- * One should lead a household and self-reliant life, discharging one's responsibilities.
- * Not to divulge God-knowledge without the explicit permission of the True Master.

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