

## Universal Religion - Swami Omkarananda

### The Common Essence

In this age a universal religion has a distinctive role to play and has the greatest appeal. We unite all religions by discovering the common Principle in all of us. We are all children and manifestations of the one Truth, the one Reality, the one Consciousness. Some call themselves Christians, some call themselves Jews, and some Muslims. These are only external social institutions and external creeds of religion. The basic, central religion is the same everywhere. By emphasizing the essentials of this basic inner religion we can unite all religions.

In all religions, what is the uniting Principle? The Divine, the Truth, is the uniting Principle. God is the uniting Principle. The conception of God in every religion may have its own limitations, but the limitations are in the conceiving individual, in the thinking individual, in the human individual, not in God Himself.

The real God is one, and all religions agree on that point. That can become the basis for uniting all religions.

The world is formed not by matter. Matter did not create the world. Matter itself is a created object; it has not produced life; it is not the Creator. It is itself produced by something else. Matter is an effect. What is it that formed the matter? God, Truth, the Supreme Cause. Where is this Cause? It is everywhere. It is in the matter, above the matter. It is everything. It is above everything. It is divine Consciousness. Matter and all life, the entire field of experience, the whole universe, is formed by the divine Consciousness, or God; is supported by God, is in God. A new dimension comes into our life the moment we grow conscious of this fact. One who is conscious of this is alone building his life on the rock. Any man who is not conscious of this Truth is making a mistake, has problems, difficulties, trials, and sufferings.

Since God is divine Consciousness, and since God has formed this universe, and since we are in this universe, we are in the divine Consciousness, in Truth. The whole cosmos, the world and the life is the field of Truth, the field of our experience and growth.

No-one can be happy if he is not in harmony with God, with Truth. Any man with even a little hatred in his inner heart is exposed to suffering, is cut off from Truth, has his life built upon the sands. The world can be best enjoyed only by those who are in harmony with God. No-one can have any satisfaction in life unless he has an underlying consciousness of God who is infinite Peace, infinite Wealth. If you have an underlying consciousness of God, an underlying consciousness of this Wealth, your life prospers, you have imperishable wealth; but if there is not this underlying consciousness of God, and if there is not an inner harmony between yourself and God, though you may be a millionaire, you are the poorest man in the world.

I am trying to transmit to people the living Spirit of God. I have no interest in life, and I am not attached to an institution. My only attachment is to God, and I am trying to present to people the transforming Spirit, the liberating Presence of God. I am not destroying the rules of the organization of the religion, - my teaching lights a candle, brings a fresh light into the organized religion. If religions were to live only by dead dogmas, they would not make progress, they would not find life a growing process, a developing phenomenon.

People as such are either completely dominated by dogmas and view, and by the pressure of religious institutions, or they have no faith in them, reject them. People need a greater attachment to the religion into which they are born. We can assimilate the best tendencies in other religions into our religion. We should not contradict, oppose, but assimilate.

### The Purpose of True Religion

True religion does not kill the happiness of the human individual, but enables the human individual to rise above all sorrow. That is the test of true religion; and a true spiritual life is that life which is constantly, continuously in a happy, creative, productive state. A religion which does not enable you to be in a higher, happy state of consciousness, always, in all conditions, is not a true religion.

When a child is in a happy state of consciousness you see him producing newer and newer words of his own make, though those words are meaningless words and strange sounds. Creativity, happiness, productivity, luminosity are characteristics of this higher state of consciousness. In that happy state of the child's inner consciousness, if you impart some lessons or give him some education, it goes deep into the heart and is retained by him fully. Suppose the child has lost this inner state of higher happy consciousness and has become moody. You tell him to do something, he will not do it. Teach him something, he cannot retain. This state, this moodiness is unnatural and a negative state. The aim of true religion and true spirituality is to see how it can quickly restore him to a higher, happy, expanded state of consciousness, where he grows productive, learns much and becomes a light to himself and to the world. The difference between the saint and the ordinary person is that the saint or the sage is in a position to retain his inner, higher singing, composing, happy consciousness in all conditions, even in the face of death, dangers, disasters.

It is the duty of the parents, the teacher and the society around the child to keep it in that happy higher state of creative consciousness. Even so, it is the central aim and task of true religion to keep the human individual in a happy, creative, higher state of consciousness. Religion should not destroy human happiness but enrich it, making it absolute, everlasting.

It is the task of true religion to free the human individual from all sense of sorrow, to integrate the human personality, to uplift human emotions and to sublimate them into the steady light of higher Love, to free the human individual from all sense of defeat and

frustration, all sense of weakness or helplessness, and to cause in him unbreakable faith and all-conquering, triumphing will-force. Any religion which does not execute this function is not a right religion, and does not carry in itself the resources of true religion.

### Religion is One, East and West

What is religion? If you look at the etymology of the term religion, and try to see the root of the word religion, you will find that it is said: religion is something that unites one thing to the other. What is united to what? Man is to be united to God. The soul and the consciousness in man is to be united to God. Religion does not mean Christianity, not Hinduism, not Judaism, not Islam. Religion is anything which unites us with God.

It is sheer childishness to say that one religion is lower, another religion higher. All religions have aimed at only one aim: the Truth. All religions are pointers to the Truth. This is an undeniable fact in human history, in the world of spirituality also. This is the first and fundamental fact. Truth is the wonder of wonders, the timeless infinite Reality.

The most sincere and earnest persons who turn to the East for Light must come to the final conclusion, after their decades of struggle, efforts and earnest striving after the Truth, that the highest wisdom that they have found is already embodied in their own scriptures, is already treasured in the heart of their own religion. And if you refer to the Upanishads as the treasures that embody highest, deepest spiritual wisdom, you will find the same treasures in the words of Christ. There is absolutely no difference between the Truth experienced by one religion and another. The Jews experience God in their particular way, the Iranians, the Mohammedans, the Buddhists experience God in their own way. The Christians experience God as Father. Is that Spirit that God is, only a Father, or only a Mother, or only a Truth, or only a Light? It is all these and infinitely more.

God is Spirit. You can address Him in any way you like. You can call Him any way you like: Truth, Father, Mother, Saviour. Whatever name you give to God, He responds to it. Truth is one. It is unchanging. But the depths of spiritual vision embodied in the scriptures, the highest spiritual truths incorporated in their statements, have not yet been taught in everyday life. If the human individual does not use one tenth of his brain's capacities, as the scientist says, he does not use one tenth of the marvellous, mighty, life-transforming spiritual wisdom embodied in the scriptures.

We live and move and have our being in the Divine. This is the Christian Truth, and it is also the Truth of other religions, and has parallels in the great cultures of the world. And if this is the Truth of other religions, it is only a confirmation of this Truth, - it reveals its inner identity with the other truths. It is a great mistake that the Western mind has not turned to this Truth, has not turned to this marvellous statement of living experience.

When the scientist says the air that you breathe in has oxygen and nitrogen, it is a statement of fact. Every minute, every moment, you are breathing in and breathing out,

without knowing that you are drawing in oxygen and nitrogen. Even so, every day you are living and moving here on earth without knowing the marvellous fact experienced that you are living and moving in the Divine.

Life is great as such and has infinite dignity, in so far as it is a formulation of the Divine in the Divine. Each of us has endless dignity, endless value, for the simple reason that we are in the Divine. All space is filled with the divine Presence.

In us is the Image of the Divine. Human nature and human perception find in everyday life people made not in the Image of the Divine but in the image of something which is not divine. But this is the report of the physical vision, it is the report of human experience. If we live by spiritual truths and teachings, all our life becomes a heaven, a perpetual peace, a peace that passes understanding. Life is given us in order we may know God and experience the infinite Happiness, the fullness of Happiness. It is intense, unlimited Happiness, unimaginable and unconditioned, even as it is also a Peace that passes understanding, an everlasting Peace, a Peace that is the Divine. This God, this Divine, is the infinite divine Consciousness. Being subtler than space, it is all-pervasive. It is the highest universal feature. In It all are united.

#### God as the Divine Consciousness

As all planets and all stars share one space, so does everyone and everything in creation share the one Consciousness.

The meaning assigned to "consciousness" should be discovered only in the context in which it is used. When consciousness is said to be imperfect and different in different people, the reference is to a merely limited form and expression of consciousness. When consciousness is spoken of as perfect, subtler than space, infinite, all-pure, timeless, it is a reference to the unlimited Reality in the individual, and in this context it could be called the One in the many. And all the many are in this One. It should not be confounded with the several or numberless modes of ordinary human consciousness.

This fundamental unity in Consciousness is the only right foundation for essential unity, national unity, international unity, religious unity. It is the Consciousness in the highest Essential in a being. It is the Essential of all essentials.

Life has to be enriched by this Knowledge. Everything is a manifestation of that Consciousness, and all the infinite Perfections of that infinite Consciousness, that mighty Intelligence, are in every heart; and this can be experienced.

Human dignity lies in this spiritual knowledge. The more of this knowledge you have, the less mistakes you make in life, the more progress you make in life, the more pure you remain, and therefore an instrument of harmony, order, and perfection.

The one God, the one Truth, the one Consciousness, the one Intelligence, is in all. The inner Intelligence in you and the inner intelligence in another person are not two things; they are an organic One. This Principle is in all beings; therefore, you are related to each other in this inner Intelligence, in this inmost Principle, or God, which is One in the many. This has to be known. This is the right foundation for true religion, for lasting love, the real foundation for respecting each other. No matter what the person is, if you know him to be the centre of infinite Intelligence, automatically a value is set on him, automatically reverence for him arises in you. He is no more the body he appears to be. You are full of reverence for that which you are perceiving in him - the centre of infinite Consciousness, God. The flower is no more what it appears to be the moment your inner intelligence perceives a dynamic activity in it by the unfoldment of the flower. What has developed the flower there, is the same Principle which is developing us here. The ultimate Reality or Existence in us is one and the same in all men. The human ceases to be a human individual for you when you are in a position to perceive the operations of the infinite Intelligence in his inner spirit. This is the process of growth in knowledge. This is how we have to understand life and people. Then the dimensions of our personality become wider and greater.

The respect for every individual which democracy teaches has no foundation. That is why many forms of democracy have perished. It is not for the first time in history that we are democratic. Ancient Greece had democracy, and that democracy perished. Our democracy also will perish unless it is supported by this inner spiritual knowledge. You must be able to perceive the One in the many, and the many people in the One. We are all one in the inner spirit. This knowledge is most fundamental and most essential. If this we have, our life becomes a perpetual paradise, no matter what the outer circumstances are. We are always greater than our problems, and our strength to endure our pains and our challenges is greater than our pains and challenges.

The greater the wisdom, the greater the knowledge of the science of life, the less you are troubled by the events of life, and the more power you have to make the circumstances better and better. He who discovers the central Truth becomes a great personality, a perpetual source of joy and peace to himself and also to others.

The cosmos, the universe, life is the field of our experience and growth. It is a school, a natural college for everybody. It is the field of our evolution. The whole cosmic manifestation is a field for the development of our inner love, affection, sense of harmony, sense of the infinite. It is a grand arena for the growth of the powers of the soul in us, of the higher mind in us. And the purpose of this universal manifestation is that this wave, this individual, may recover a consciousness of the Sea, of the Infinite, of the Absolute. The purpose of man in the world is to know the highest potentialities in himself, the Truth. Spiritual evolution is your goal, the development of your higher personality is the goal. This is the foundation of every true religion.

All the creative powers, all that has been grand and great and genius-like in every great person in human history, is there in your inner Spirit. Let us think in terms of the Divine, act in terms of the Divine, feel in terms of the Divine; and we will find new dimensions

of the world disclose themselves to us. How is it that uneducated persons like Surdas are the greatest poets of the world, the greatest devotees of the world, men of inner ecstasy, inner joy, inner peace, inner light? They are shining examples of our inner spiritual possibilities. They show us that every one of us can find the peace that passes understanding, can utter words that will live for ever, show a fearlessness in daily life that is astonishing, live in true freedom, real freedom, freedom given by the Spirit within us, by the immortal and imperishable Soul in us, which is the Truth.

Truth alone can grant you freedom. The real freedom is the freedom that comes from the knowledge of the Truth, the freedom that results from your inner experience of the imperishability of the Spirit within you and around you, the freedom that emerges from the knowledge of the Divine, the Divine as endless Treasures, as eternal Life, as absolute Knowledge, as infinite Goodness, as boundless Light, Love and Perfection. It is with these essences and values we are constituted in our inner being.

### The Essentials of All Religions

The whole world, every speck of space, is filled with the Omnipotence of God, is filled with the Omniscience of God. We are being seen all the time by the all-seeing Intelligence of the omnipresent Divinity. The Divine is perceiving everyone at the same time around the universe. It is a baffling Intelligence. We cannot describe It; we cannot even imagine It. It is a mighty and glorious Intelligence, and this Intelligence has infinite Love for each of us. It has come into human history at different times taking different forms. It has founded the manifold religions for the welfare and progress of all humanity. We have to evolve towards that divine Intelligence through the religion into which we are born. The essentials of all religions are the same. Catholicism says love your neighbour, have faith in God, be good, be moral. What does Protestantism say? Exactly the same thing. What does Judaism say? Exactly the same. What does Islam say? Exactly the same. What does Hinduism say? Exactly the same.

Love is the same everywhere, in all religions, in all races, in all nations.

Truth is the same in all cultures, in all nations, in all religions.

Goodness is the same in all religions.

Faith is the same in all religions.

Devotion is the same in all religions.

Knowledge is the same in all religions.

All these could become the factors for uniting all religions.

What does it matter whether you are a Hindu or Jew, a Catholic or a Protestant? What does it matter whether you are in a white body or in a black body? What is necessary is to exercise faith, love, prayer, service. It does not matter to which religion you belong, to which denomination you belong. God-experience does not respect age, it does not respect race, colour of the body, it does not respect religion and denomination. It does not respect the age of the world: we cannot say it was easier to experience God during Krishna's or Rama's or Jesus' time, but in our time it is difficult or impossible. All these are arguments born of lack of real knowledge.

When you are earnestly pursuing God, through whatever body God has given you, whatever denomination of religion you are born into, whatever may be your sex and age, whatever be your conditions and your circumstances, you are bound to make progress on the path; and God's Grace is bound to furnish you all the help which your denomination and religion does not provide you. Whatever may be the defects and the deficiencies of your religion, whatever may be the glory and advantages of other religions, God will give you infinitely more help than the best religion in the world can give you, provided you are sincere in your pursuit. So, what is essential? Begin with the equipment that God has given you, and you will gather, attract to yourself all the help which is necessary for you to become God's true son or daughter. But when there is lack of sincerity and earnestness, you will be full of doubts. You will complain that your religion does not provide all the advantages of some other religion, that Christianity is not half as wonderful as Buddhism, half as wonderful as Islam or as Hinduism. All these are creations of lack of sincerity and earnestness in following the path of God. Quietly proceed further and further, and as you proceed, the other religions will help you, the world will help you, your own faith will help you. You will get help from every direction. You will become great. God helps those who help themselves.

And until you achieve complete union with God, your spiritual evolution and progress continue. Be with God: you will be not only the light of the denomination of the religion you are born into, but you will be the light of all other religions.

Evolution is a very slow process. You do not sow a seed today and reap the grains tomorrow morning. It takes time. Growth is a slow process. Nature has taken millions of years to evolve man, says science. Religious science says nature takes several million years more before it could evolve out of man a spiritual individual. How to reduce this long evolutionary process? What is the shortest way to experience God? Through true religion, through spiritual practices, through rich, fiery blazing spiritual knowledge, intense faith, or a pure heart of universal love.

As new realities discovered by scientists are hidden from common humanity, as the soul in man is hidden from common gaze, as even the air is hidden from the human sight, though it can be felt by the skin, God is hidden everywhere. He has to be discovered, experienced.

Devotion discovers Him. Love discovers Him. Growth in purity discovers Him. Growth in wisdom discovers Him. This growth in wisdom is greatly helped by constant reflection upon scriptural passages and by the study of the lives of saints.

There is in each of us the divine Centre, the Eternity, God. That is the Source of unending happiness, knowledge, power, love and perfection. We will never be in a position to understand It, perceive It, experience It, unless we transform our unconsciousness, transform our subconsciousness, and our outer life, by constant pursuit of spiritual activities and aims.

True religion is that body of knowledge and that body and system of discipline which connects us with God. True religion is nothing but a life lived in accordance with the living Truth. Such a life is the real strength of any lasting culture; it is the light of real and enduring civilization.

God, or Truth, are one and the same. He is not wise who makes a difference between Truth and God. It is ignorance to make differences. It is the cause of unhappiness to make distinctions.

#### The One Truth in All Forms

There are not two truths, there is only one Truth. There is only one Kingdom of God, not two. There is only one divine Consciousness. Whether you call it Krishna, Christ or God, it is one and the same. If the Muslims say Allah, know that Allah to be your God, because by Allah he means God, and God is only One. If we are worshipping God as Krishna, the Muslims are worshipping God as Allah.

Any saintly heart can experience God anywhere, and in the manner his devotion determines. God is not imprisoned in the form that is attributed to Him: He is eternal Freedom in Itself. He is the heart of Truth, constantly responding to the love in the saintly heart.

While our body lives and moves in this matter-moulded universe of time and space and circumstance, the Spirit in us, the very nature of the soul in us, is self-transcending, all-transcending. A timeless Being is resident in this time-controlled body.

There is only one goal for all educational endeavours, all evolutionary efforts, all cultural activities, all spiritual practices: the experience of the Truth, the experience of the infinite creative Consciousness. With that goal in our eyes we have to conduct the daily activities of life, and endeavour to see that our attention is constantly turned towards the Divine. It is the goal of life; it is the final aim of evolution.

How strong, how beautiful, how genius-like our life is, rests upon the extent to which we establish contact with the Divine, the Truth, the inner resources of the timeless and supreme Spirit. A conscious experience of this fact is the aim of all religious activities, of

all cultural endeavours, of all spiritual disciplines. All wisdom, all knowledge points towards this goal. Let us abide by the dictates of wisdom, and let the Grace of the Divine render our lives more and more beautiful and peaceful, rich and abundant, through the unfoldment of higher and higher excellences, the growth in love, in knowledge and in wisdom. Let us recognize the Presence of one Life, of one God, in the inner heart of all creatures. Let us live our daily life from the power, the peace, and the joy that come from a strong sense of our inner organic relations with the supreme Creator, God.

- Swami Omkarananda