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Solution to the Malady of the World

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Abstract

The social disquiet and conflicts in the world today are the result of people's attitude towards Religion. The paper attempts at addressing this societal issue through the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. The paper compiles the ideas of Swami Vivekananda on religion and morality. It reflects on the soundness of his ideas even after nearly 120 years and the relevance of the teachings in the present day world. The study is an attempt to shift the focus of the world towards the concept of religion harping not on the differences between them but on the similarity and the common goals that tie them. Swami Vivekananda felt that it was time to broaden the spiritual steps. The religious ideals should embrace all good and great that exists in the world. He also felt that religious ideals should have a scope for future development. The paper emphasises that, Swami Vivekananda, a noble soul, believed in 'inherent goodness' of man and the concept that the goodness can be nurtured by reiterating the importance of it. It further tries to suggest the methodologies that can be adopted to create an 'onward movement of the entire human race as one body' progressing towards a more peaceful world. As his rousing call suggests, if 'sleeping soul' is roused to 'self-conscious activity', power, glory, goodness, purity and all that is great will come.

Key Words: Swami Vivekananda, inherent goodness, sleeping soul, self-conscious activity, glory

World today is torn apart by strife. We have countries warring, communities clashing and human race, divided into caste, creed & religion forgetting the goal of birth i.e. self realization. They indulge in mindless violence. The situation is so critical that the future of the entire mankind is threatened. The conflicts might even obliterate the human race. It becomes necessary at this juncture to find a solution to this problem. It is mandatory at this juncture to look back upon the world of past and ruminate about the values no longer with us. It is time to reassure ourselves that we really have it in us to transform the dreary world of today into a peaceful haven in future. It is time to seek that which is needed in order to bring about this transformation.

This elusive dogma that can bring about the change can be found from the perspective of culture which has been the pivotal crux of human race. This search may very well be begun from our country which has been the cultural cradle in the past innumerable centuries. Let us begin with our

country and expand all around until we encompass the entire world. This makes sense in this present day world which is aptly called 'global village'. The limitations of branding no longer apply. It is expected and even appreciated if we look for the good in any deserving but obscure corner instead of rejecting the elixir just because it is alien and hence strange, baffling and unknown. This broad-mindedness is indeed nothing new. East had set a tone to this trans-cultural acceptance when it accepted English, Tea parties, Pubs and Computers, assimilated them into its flow of life and progressed. So had the West, absorbing our eastern Hindu Concepts like Pranayama, Yogasana and Meditation.

Coming back to the problem in hand, let us look at what ails the world today. Human beings have a marked lack of tolerance. This intolerance and its repercussions give rise to a multitude of issues. The resulting change in the humans is not an illness of the bodies but of the souls. They are afflicted by a Malady that affects morality. The Malady strikes at the roots of psyche, sickening it and rotting the humanitarianism which is the core. When the core is afflicted, souls are dead and human beings are reduced to a state akin to animals. They consider nothing wrong and let no concern, legal, ethical or humanitarian stop them from doing what they think is fair. This gives rise to a multitude of crimes, ranging from taunting others to genocide.

Now that the causes and effects have been identified, it is time to think of the cure. The best way to treat the ill souls is to give a dose of Spirituality. This powerful concept will help us weed out the poisonous elements of dispute among men, bring about a metamorphosis, smoothen the path and guide mankind towards the ultimate goal of Self- realization. Spirituality will bring in its wake its basic tenet Morality. Swami Satprakashananda says:

Morality exists in human life in many different forms. The highest standard of morality means unselfishness; it considers goodness as a value; it teaches universal love without any distinction of merit, color, status or creed. If we look for such a high ethical standard as universal love, which transcends all barriers between man and man, then it must be based on the spiritual oneness of mankind. It is the spiritual reality that is all-comprehensive and all-pervading. It goes beyond all limitations. There is, according to all religions of the world, a spiritual basis of the universe, which is the very perfection of the existence. It sustains and manifests everything. It is the Light of the light. That Soul of the universe is the soul of each and every one of us. That is manifest in human beings as the inmost self, as conscious spirit. (18).

So when we look for morality here, we look for this unselfishness which should guide the men and women of today who have to co-exist and have to attempt to blend harmoniously despite their differences in caste, creed, religion, language and culture. This is essential in order to survive. The majority of us who exist peacefully do have this value in us. It is required to spread it to all. This is critical at this stage because the minority is a threat to the survival of the majority. It is not enough if an individual only survives; there is the need of a higher level, i.e. the need to progress. By progress, it is meant the development in economic, political and cultural fronts. It does not simply stop with

these. It also includes a progress in the outlook of man, an essential up-gradation in the inherent goodness of man, which the unselfishness will ultimately bring about. While the former, tangible progresses are pseudo and superficial, the latter heals one's soul and hence is much more important.

This priority to the internal development of man is nothing new. This cause has consistently been taken up by the great thinkers, who have, through their farsightedness, tried to tap the inherent spirituality of man and nurture it. They knew the connection between the internal development and Universal Peace. The prominent among these thinkers was Swami Vivekananda, who in the year 1896, said, "The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good." (Vivekananda 5: 192). The words were not uttered in desperation or expectation. Swami Vivekananda had a lot of faith in mankind. He never thought to look outside man for goodness. He never suggested external factors or support for enhancing the goodness of man. He had a strong belief that man was inherently good. As Swami Satprakashananda tells:

The potential divinity of man is the fundamental teaching of religion, irrespective of doctrine or dogma, but without inner purity this truth does not shine within a person. Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man. To realize this divinity is the goal of human life. According to every theistic religion, God is infinite, eternal. Not only is He the omnipotent, omniscient Ruler of the universe, He is the all-pervading Self of the universe underlying every form of existence. He dwells within every individual as the innermost self, the central principle of consciousness, ever-shining within the psychophysical garb....(20) The more you recognize your inmost self and your relationship with the Supreme Being, the more you feel your relationship with your fellow-beings, because the same Supreme Being dwells in all as the inmost self.(20-21)

The process of recognizing the inmost self is not at all difficult according to Swami Vivekananda. The path he charts is quite simple. It is the awakening of the soul. "Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when the sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity". (Vivekananda 3: 193). By 'conscious activity', Swami meant an awareness and practice of religion. The greatness of Swami Vivekananda lies in the fact that, though he was a Hindu monk, he was speaking not only about Hinduism, or Sanadhana Dharma, when he said:

Religion is the greatest motive power for realizing that infinite energy which is the birth right and nature of every man. In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power, and therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint.... All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go. All sect ideas and tribal or national ideals of religion must be given up. That each tribe or nation should have its own particular God and think that every other is wrong, is a superstition that should belong to the past. All such

ideas must be abandoned. As the human mind broadens, the spiritual steps broaden too. The time has already come when a man cannot record a thought without its reaching to all corners of the earth; by merely physical means we have come into touch with the whole world.... The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world that is good and great, and, at the same time have infinite scope for future development. All that was good in the past must be preserved; and the doors must be kept open for future additions to the already existing store. Religions must also be inclusive, and not looked down with contempt upon one another, because their particular ideals of God are different. (Vivekananda 2: 67)

When Swami Vivekananda prescribed that “narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go”, that instruction was a pathway that may very well lead us to the ideal world, a harmonious society. Swami Vivekananda visualised “an onward movement of the entire human race as one body, as in an orderly procession in which every individual plays his part while moving ahead”, according to Swami Satprakashananda. (24) Unlike many other religious leaders, Swami Vivekananda does not emphasize that only his religion is ‘the’ path to be followed. In his address in the Parliament of Religions, he told the story of a frog who lived in a well for a long time; he was born there and brought up there and he thought that nothing in the world could be bigger than his well. He refuses to accept the claim that the sea was bigger than his abode.

Swami Vivekananda concludes the story thus “I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks that the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that the whole world is his well”. (Vivekananda 1: 5). Using this little story, he brings out the problem in the mindset of people and their narrow mindedness. Swami Vivekananda neither spares the people of his religion nor does he propose conversion as the answer to the problem.

The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.... Holiness, purity and charity are not exclusive possessions of any church in the world... every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: “Help and not Fight” “Assimilation and not Destruction”, “Harmony and Peace and not Dissension” (Vivekananda 1: 24)

As Swami Vivekananda famously proclaimed, “The end of all religions is the realizing of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. If there is one universal truth in all religions, I place it here – in realizing God. Ideals and methods may differ, but that is the central point. There may be a thousand different radii, but they all converge to the one center, and that is the realization of God” (Vivekananda 1: 324 -325). Swami Vivekananda’s concept of a Universal Religion seems to be the

need of the hour. If we attempt to spread this awareness about the various religions, their purpose and function, we will be able to guide the misguided souls of today to the right path of God, be it Krishna, or Jesus, or Allah. "Religion is realization, not talk, nor doctrines, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion" (Vivekananda 2: 396).

If this ideal is reached, the entire disharmony is resolved and peace will prevail in the world. We can proudly state that we have reached a utopian state where the world will "not be broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls" and "tireless striving will stretch its arms towards perfection". (Tagore 52) God, whatever name we call him by, will lead our minds forward into ever widening thought and action into that heaven of Peace.

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