

CHAPTER XI SPIRITUAL ASPIRANTS AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

*God of all religions the same - Different religions as paths to God - Cause of fanaticism and its cure -
Right attitude to religious differences-Attitude to secret cults*

God of All Religions the Same

457. As one and the same water is called by different names by different people, some calling it 'water', some 'Vari', some 'Aqua' and some 'Pani' so the one Sachchidananda-Existence-Intelligence-Bliss Absolute is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as **Hari** and by others as **Brahman**.

458. In a potter's shop there are vessels of different shapes and forms-pots, jars, dishes, plates, etc.-but all are made of the same clay. So God is one, but He is worshipped in different ages and climes under different names and aspects.

459. As the same sugar is made into various figures of birds and beasts, so the one sweet Divine Mother is worshipped in various climes and ages under various names and forms.

460. Various ornaments are made of gold. Although their substance is the same, they are called variously and appear in different forms. So one and the same God is worshipped in different countries and ages under different names and forms. He may be worshipped in various ways according to different conceptions--some may like to regard Him as father and others as mother, some as friend and others as beloved, some again as the innermost treasure of their heart and others as their sweet little child-but it is always one and the same God that is worshipped in all these diverse relations.

461. Once a dispute arose among the learned men at the court of the Maharajah of Burdwan as to who was the greater of the two Deities, **Siva** and **Vishnu**. Some of the courtiers said that **Siva** was the greater, while the others gave the preference to **Vishnu**. When the dispute grew hot, a wise **Pandit** remarked, "Sir, I have seen neither **Siva** nor **Vishnu**. How can I say who is the greater of the two?" Do not try to compare one Deity with another. When you see one of the Deities, you will come to know that they are all the manifestations of the same **Brahman**.

Different Religions as Paths to God

462. There are several bathing ghats in a large tank. Whoever goes to whichever **ghat** he pleases to take a bath or to fill his vessel reaches the water, and it is useless to quarrel with one another claiming one's **ghat** to be better than another's. Similarly, there are many ghats that lead to the water of the fountain of Eternal Bliss. Every religion of the world is one **ghat**. Go direct with a sincere and earnest heart through anyone of these ghats, and you shall reach the water of Eternal Bliss. But say not that your religion is better than that of another.

463. Many are the names of God and infinite are the forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him, through them you will realise Him.

464. Different 'creeds are but different paths to reach the one God. Diverse are the ways that lead to the temple of Mother **Kali** at **Kalighat** in Calcutta. Similarly various are the paths that take men to the house of the Lord. Every religion is nothing but one of these paths.

465. Some years ago when the Hindus and the Brahmos were preaching their respective religions with true earnestness and great zeal, someone asked the **Master** what his opinion was regarding the two schools. In reply the **Master** said, "I see that my Divine Mother is getting Her work done through both these schools."

466. Questioned by a pious **Brahmo** as to what constituted the difference between Hinduism and Brahmoism, the **Master** said that the difference was the same as that between a single note and the whole gamut. The **Brahmo** religion was content with the single note of the **Brahman**, while the Hindu religion was made up of several notes, which together produce a sweet harmony.

467. One can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope; so too, diverse are the ways of approaching God, and each religion in the world shows one of the ways.

468. The light of the gas-lamp illuminates various localities with varying intensity, but the sustenance 'of light, namely, the gas, comes from one common store. So the religious teachers of all lands and of all ages are but so many lamps through which the light of the Spirit streams constantly from the one almighty source.

469. The cries of all jackals are the same. So are the teachings of all the wise ones the same.

The Cause of Fanaticism and its Cure

470. Through ignorance a common man considers his own religion to be the best and makes much useless clamour; but when his mind is illumined by true Knowledge, all sectarian quarrels disappear.

471. Two persons were hotly disputing over the colour of a chameleon. One said, "The chameleon on that palm tree is of a beautiful red colour." The other contradicted him saying, "You are mistaken, the chameleon is not red, but blue." Being unable to settle the matter through argument both went to a man who always lived under that tree and had watched the chameleon in all its phases. One of the disputants asked him, "Sir, is not the chameleon, on that tree, of a red colour?" The man replied, "Yes, sir." The other disputant said, "What do you say! How is that possible! Surely it is not red but blue!" The man again humbly replied, "Yes, sir." He knew that the chameleon constantly changed its colour. So he said 'Yes' to both the conflicting views-God who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, has likewise various forms. The devotee who has seen God only in one aspect knows that and that aspect alone. None but he who has seen Him in manifold aspects, can say, "All these forms are of the one God, for God is multiform." God is formless and with form, and many are His forms which no one knows about.

472. Dal (sedge) does not grow in large tanks with pure water. It grows only in small, stagnant and miasmatic pools. Similarly Dal (schism) does not occur in a party, whose members are guided by pure, broad and unselfish motives. It occurs only in a party whose members are selfish, insincere and bigoted.

473. Is it good to create sects (Dal)? Here is a pun on the word 'dal' which means in Bengali both a 'sect' or 'party' and 'the rank growth on the surface of a stagnant pool'. The 'dal' cannot grow in flowing water; it grows only in stagnant pools. He whose heart constantly flows towards the Lord has no time for anything else. He who seeks fame and honour forms sects.

474. Men may partition their lands with measuring rods and boundary lines, but no one can so partition the all-embracing sky overhead. The one sky surrounds all and includes all. The unenlightened man in his ignorance says that his religion is the only true one and that it is the best. But when his heart is illumined by the light of true Knowledge, he comes to know that above all the wars of sects and creeds is the *one* Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (Akhandā Sachchidananda).

Right Attitude To Religious Differences

475. Whoever performs devotional exercises with the belief that there is but one God, is bound to attain Him, no matter in what aspect, name or manner He is worshipped.

476. You will advance, whatever way you meditate on Him or recite His holy names. The cake made of sugar candy will taste equally sweet, whether it is held straight or oblique when you eat it.

477. Q. If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that God is painted differently by different religionists?

A. God is one, but His aspects are many. As the master of a house is father to one, brother to another and husband to a third, and is called by different names by different persons, so the one God is described in various ways according to the particular aspects in which He appears to particular worshippers.

478. As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, sago and arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out for different men different paths suitable to their natures.

479. Sankaracharya's exposition of the Vedānta is indeed true, and true also is what Ramanuja speaks of it-his Visishtadvaita philosophy.

480. Let a man be a Christian in the matter of mercy, a Moslem in the matter of strict observance of external forms, and a Hindu in the matter of universal charity, charity towards all living creatures.

481. When you go out and mix with people, you should have love for them all; mix with them freely and become one with them. You should not shrug your shoulders and hate them, saying, "They believe in a Personal God, and not in the Impersonal," or "They believe in the Impersonal and not in the Personal," or "They are Christians, Hindus, or Mussalmans." Man understands of Him only as much as He makes him understand.

Moreover knowing that men are of different tendencies, you should mix with them as much as you can. And you should love all. Then returning to your own 'home' (heart) you will enjoy bliss and peace. There you will meet your own real self.

482. Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, and a Mohammedan Mohammedanism. For the Hindu, the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best.

483. A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth. One should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

484. Dispute not. As you rest firmly on your own faith and opinion, allow others also equal liberty to stand by their own faith and opinion. By mere disputation you will never succeed in convincing another of his error. When the grace of God descends, every man will understand his own mistakes.

485. One day the **Master** was heard talking to the Mother of the universe, in a God-intoxicated state "Mother, everyone says, 'My watch keeps correct time.' The Chris-

tians, the Hindus, the Mohammedans; all say, 'My religion is the true religion'. But Mother, nobody's watch is exact. Who can truly know Thee? But again, if one seeks Thee with a yearning heart, one can reach Thee by Thy grace through any path, through any religion."

486. Some ardent moralists among the Master's disciples often found fault with certain people of great spiritual attainments, because some of the practices they followed were the secret rites of the Saktas and Vaishnavas which seemed to violate ordinary rules of morality. To them the **Master** used to say: "They are not to be blamed. For they have the thorough conviction that the paths they follow lead by themselves to God-realisation. Whatever is ardently believed in and adopted, as a means to God-realisation should not be found fault with. No aspirant's attitude should be condemned, since any attitude, if sincerely followed, is sure to lead to God, who is the consummation of all attitudes. Go on calling upon Him, each in your own way, and don't find fault with another's path nor take to it for your own".

487. With a view to removing the antagonism of his disciples towards secret cults, the **Master** would sometimes speak to them about his views regarding them as follows: "Well, why should you cherish hatred towards them? Know them also to be valid paths, though they may be dirty. There may be diverse entrances to a house-the front gate, the back-door and the door for the scavenger who comes to clean the dirty places in the house. Know these cults to be akin to this last mentioned door. No matter by which door one enters, when one is once within the house, one reaches the same place as the others reach. Are you therefore to imitate these people or mix with them? Certainly not. But do not hate them in any way."