

Chapter One

Religion and Yoga

Religion and the Truth

The Divine Truth is greater than any religion or creed or scripture or idea or philosophy — so you must not tie yourself to any of these things.

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I regard the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose, not a book that is closed, the lines of which have to be constantly repeated. Even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final though everything may be there in seed. In this development the recent spiritual history of India is a very important stage and the names I mentioned [*Ramakrishna and Vivekananda*] had a special prominence in my thought at the time — they seemed to me to indicate the lines from which the future spiritual development had most directly to proceed, not staying but passing on. I do not know that I would put my meaning exactly in the language you suggest. I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion new or old for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter.

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It is news to me that I have excluded Mahomedans from the Yoga. I have not done it any more than I have excluded Europeans or Christians. As for giving up one's past, if that means giving up the outer forms of the old religions, it is done as much by the Hindus here as by the Mahomedans. The Hindus here — even those who were once orthodox Brahmins and have grown old in it, — give up all observance of caste, take food from Pariahs and are served by them, associate and eat with Mahomedans, Christians, Europeans, cease to practise temple worship or

Sandhya (daily prayer and mantras), accept a non-Hindu from Europe as their spiritual director. These are things people who have Hinduism as their aim and object would not do — they do it because they are obliged here to look to a higher ideal in which these things have no value. What is kept of Hinduism is Vedanta and Yoga, in which Hinduism is one with Sufism of Islam and with the Christian mystics. But even here it is not Vedanta and Yoga in their traditional limits (their past), but widened and rid of many ideas that are peculiar to the Hindus. If I have used Sanskrit terms and figures, it is because I know them and do not know Persian and Arabic. I have not the slightest objection to anyone here drawing inspiration from Islamic sources if they agree with the Truth as Sufism agrees with it. On the other hand I have not the slightest objection to Hinduism being broken to pieces and disappearing from the face of the earth, if that is the Divine Will. I have no attachment to past forms; what is Truth will always remain; the Truth alone matters.

Religion in India

Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with the errors that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral temple half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail, but always fantastic with a significance — crumbled and overgrown in many places, but a cathedral temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and its real presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. The outer social structure which it built for its approach is another matter.

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If it is meant by the statement [*of Mahatma Gandhi*]¹ that the

¹ “But religion is not like a house or a cloak, which can be changed at will. It is more an integral part of one's self than of one's body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's Creator and whilst the body perishes, as it has to, religion persists even after death.” M. K. Gandhi, on a statement by B. R. Ambedkar concerning change of religion, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 62 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, 1975), p. 37. — Ed.

form of religion is something permanent and unchangeable, then that cannot be accepted. But if religion here means one's way of communion with the Divine, then it is true that that is something belonging to the inner being and cannot be changed like a house or a cloak for the sake of some personal, social or worldly convenience. If a change is to be made, it can only be for an inner spiritual reason, because of some development from within. No one can be bound to any form of religion or any particular creed or system, but if he changes the one he has accepted for another, for external reasons, that means he has inwardly no religion at all and both his old and his new religion are only an empty formula. At bottom that is, I suppose, what the statement drives at. Preference for a different approach to the Truth or the desire of inner spiritual self-expression are not the motives of the recommendation of change to which objection is made by the Mahatma here; the object proposed is an enhancement of social status and consideration which is no more a spiritual motive than conversion for the sake of money or marriage. If a man has no religion in himself, he can change his credal profession for any motive; if he has, he cannot; he can only change it in response to an inner spiritual need. If a man has a bhakti for the Divine in the form of Krishna, he can't very well say, "I will swap Krishna for Christ so that I may become socially respectable."

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You can write to him not to be depressed by his failures but to go on aspiring and trust in the Divine Grace. He should not allow himself to be impeded by narrow caste ideas. Always in India the Brahmins have bowed down before a man of spiritual realisation, who becomes by that very fact of realisation above caste. He should open himself more to the help from here. Man is a mass of imperfections — it is only by the divine Grace that he reaches the Divine.

Religious Ceremonies

It is correct, religions at best modify only the surface of the

nature. Moreover they degenerate very soon into a routine of ceremonial habitual worship and fixed dogmas.

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If you feel no enthusiasm for the *śrāddha* it is better definitely to stop it. Once on this path there is no meaning in it any longer, — for the reason you yourself give.² The *śrāddha* is, besides, entirely on the vital plane and if help has to be given to those who have passed into other worlds of consciousness, there are better ways of doing it.

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Replace the *śrāddha* by a long meditation with X on the father praying that he may have all the rest and illumination that the departed can have.

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I only said what was originally *meant* by the ceremonies — the rites. I was not referring to the feeding of the caste or the Brahmins which is not a rite or ceremony. Whether the *śrāddha* as performed is actually effective is another matter — for those who perform it have not either the knowledge or the occult power.

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The old traditions [*stotras, homas, aradhanas, recitations, etc.*] are still strong with many — let them satisfy this tendency in this way so long as it does not drop from them.

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Useless and therefore inadvisable [*to sacrifice animals to Kali*]. External sacrifices of this kind have no longer any meaning — as so many saints have said, sacrifice ego, anger, lust etc. to Kali, not goats or cocks.

² The correspondent said that a sadhak is expected to forget all conventional family relationships and live only for the Divine. — Ed.

Religious Fanaticism

There is nothing noble in fanaticism — there is no nobility of motive though there may be a fierce enthusiasm of motive. Religious fanaticism is something psychologically low-born and ignorant — and usually in its action fierce, cruel and base. Religious ardour like that of the martyr who sacrifices himself only is a different thing.