

Dharma is the only Solution of Life-Problem.

BY RAM CHANDER SHARMA, B. A.

They say death is a mystery; but I say and feel that life is a mystery greater still. We see death is beyond all human ken, for nothing of death is visible or perceptible to us. But strange it is that life, though so perceptible, is still a great mystery. How well has Kālidāsa said:

‘मरणं प्रकृतिः शरीरिणां विकृतिर्जीवितमुच्यते बुधैः ।’

“Death is a normality, but life to a wise man is an abnormality.” For life depends upon breath; why should there be a constant flow of vital breath in the system of man, is a mystery, of course. Go and ask the teeming millions that inhabit the face of this globe, what life means, what the ultimate object of this hustle and bustle of our earthly existence is, why we go on working and working from day-dawn till sunset, without heaving a sigh of relief for a moment, what on earth is the longed-for end of all these all-absorbing and multifarious engagements—in a word, this long-drawn misery. Hardly you will find one man out of thousands, who will ever pause to answer this query of all queries. No wonder if here and there you, instead of receiving a good and polite answer, be welcomed with a rebuff of some such sort: “Man, have you no business to look after, that your brain has become the Devil’s workshop where such questions are being manufactured? Only a fool or an idle fellow will waste his time and energy in answering such nonsensical questions.” But, my readers, is it really a waste of time to think so? Is it not wisdom to solve the mystery of life? The great men of the world, like Lord Buddha and Christ, tried to solve it and only a few Nachiketās have solved it.

24—D. T. N.—

Understand life, if you mean to understand death. Analyse life, if you desire to unravel the mystery of death. Life and death are not two distant and different things, but the two ends of one and the same thing. If life is a door through which we have come here on earth, death is another door through which we shall have to pass on to what is called another world. Life and death are, in fact, the incoming and outgoing doors of this earthly sojourn of ours—the stage of the world-drama.

And how to understand life? Who does not know that life is an enjoyment? ‘Eat, drink and be merry’ is the be-all and end-all of life. “Let enjoyment be your aim so long as you live, though you have to beg, borrow or steal; for there remains nothing after the body is burnt to ashes.”* Such are the life-conceptions of many a young man of these days. But if such is your notion of life, dear readers, bear in mind, you have yet to learn much. See what Shakespeare says:—

What is man?

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.

Do you really believe that a mere handful of ashes or dust is the end of all the high-sounding ambitions and aspirations of man? Has the wonderful mechanism of the human body no other end but smoke? All the wisdom of olden times contradicts it. Our own experience goes against it. Even

* यावज्जीवं सुखं जीवेद् ऋणं कृत्वा घृतं पिबेत् ।

भस्मीभूतस्य देहस्य पुनरागमनं कुतः ॥

the investigations of modern science and philosophy do not bear this out. If really we believe so, then surely Burke was quite right when he said "What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!" Certainly life has a mission, an object; and surely he is a mere fool who thinks that momentary pleasures are the only aim of life. Let Shakespeare again open his eyes:—

*What will I, if I gain the thing I seek ?
—A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy!
Who buys a moment's mirth to wail a
week ?*

*Or sells Eternity to get a toy ?
For one sweet grape who will the vine
destroy ?
Or what fond beggar, but to touch the
crown,
Would with the sceptre be stricken down ?*

And how well a great man has said:—

*I slept and dreamt that life is beauty,
I woke and found that life is duty.*

(Mazzini)

Surely life is duty, a lifelong duty and not a whit more or less than duty or *Dharma*.

But what is Duty, "the stern daughter of God" ? It is a small word composed of four letters, but it covers the whole range of life as the infinite space does, which is composed of four cardinal points. It has numerous names and aspects at different times and under different circumstances; but whatever the name and aspect it may assume, its one intrinsic or essential nature or feature is always there. It is always a light to guide us, a rod to check the erring hand. It is a law and victory, when empty terrors overawe us, and a calm and peace, when our frail humanity is in the grip of confusion and despondency. In short, it is infinite bliss that we can enjoy on the face of this earth.

The only thing it requires is the utter forgetfulness of our own self in discharging it. It is too jealous to brook the self and the not-self at one and the same time.

But how to achieve this, when we see ourselves surrounded by so many difficulties ? We are, as it were, being carried away by an overwhelming wave of emotions, desires, allurements, aspirations, and so on. My answer to this is, that in the first place you shall have to revise your views about emotions and temptations. They are not useless things as many of us have been made to believe. Mind you, they are necessary steps for growth. No growth was possible without them. It is the temptation of catching hold of a bright coloured ball that makes the creeping infant go, walk, and run; and it is temptation, again, that makes a sturdy youth face the stress and storm of life. But for these temptations, the world would have been rather a dull and tasteless affair. Mind that temptations regulated and controlled make the world a heaven. So temptations are to be checked and controlled and not altogether destroyed. Mind the simile in the *Kathopanishad*, where body is compared to a car and our senses, to horses, etc.—

आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु ।
बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च ॥*

But man in his ordinary circumstances is too weak to withstand them. They often prove too strong for him. But there is no cause for losing heart. If snakes and lions can be tamed and made to dance at the gestures of man, poor temptations, too, can have no stay before the dexterity of man. There are keys to open all locks and these keys are in the hands

* The simile explains that temptations and emotions are to be regulated and trained like the horses of a chariot, so that our chariot of life may clear of all pitfalls.

of *Dharma*. If by the application of certain rules and principles, a rope-dancer can easily walk on a thin rope at a considerable height, and if man can fly in the air or live under water, surely he has the capacity for regulation of his emotions and control of his temptations. Let the reader dive deep into the essential principles of *Dharma*.

Now, the word "DHARMA" is a very comprehensive term and covers the connotation of the words Religion, Purity, Beauty, Science and Law.*

In order to realize its full significance, let us go some five thousand years back in time, and approach reverently the old Field Marshal, Bhīṣma Pitāmaha, lying on his death-bed of arrows at the field of Kurukshetra, surrounded by the Pāṇḍavas and other Aryan kings, weeping and wailing over the irreparable loss that the world was going to sustain in the demise of Bhīṣma, but at the same time longing to be initiated into the secrets of *Dharma*, for no other person was expected to have lived *Dharma* in his life so well as Bhīṣma had.

* History reveals to us that what is *Dharma* with the Hindus, Religion was with the ancient Egyptians, Beauty was with the Greeks of yore, Law with the old Romans, and Science with the Chaldeans. All these words indicate a particular line of evolution. But the word *Dharma* includes the connotations of all these and still more. Being derived from the Sanskrit root 'धृज्' it means 'ध्रियते लोकोऽनेन, धारयति लोकं वा', that is, that intrinsic nature of things of the universe that is sustaining all the universe and compelling it to its ultimate end or goal, in all its manifold forms and stages.

The English word 'Religion', derived from 're' (back or again) and 'ligare' (to join), means to bind or join again the individual soul—spark—to the Universal Soul—Fire. It covers only one aspect of *Dharma*, and so is the case with the Arabic word 'Mazhab', which means a Path. Whereas the Sanskrit word 'Dharma' connotes that innate nature of a thing created, that has the potentiality of justifying its existence and enabling it to attain its state of perfection along any line of evolution that it has got hold of during its long race of evolution.

At the request of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma Pitāmaha opened his discourse on *Dharma* with the words that just as it is the *Dharma* of the Brahman to practise charity, self-study, introspection and *tapas* (austerity), so it is the *Dharma* of the Kṣatriya to kill his enemies in the battle-field in the cause of justice and righteousness,* in order to remove from the mind of Yudhiṣṭhira the feeling of self-condemnation which stood in his way of approaching Bhīṣma; for it was he who had been the cause of his so lying on the bed of arrows. (See *Bhīṣma-Parva* LIV.) It is beyond the limited scope of this small article to reproduce even a small fraction of what Bhīṣma propounded in that long discourse covering as many as 13,775 verses. But what he said may be summed up in a few sentences. He held the view that no hard and fast rules can be laid down for describing the path of *Dharma* for all and sundry. *Dharma*, like morality, varies with individuals. What is right for one, may be wrong for another. So *Dharma* is a relative term differing with different persons in accordance with the stage of their evolution. In fact, all our knowledge, all our right and wrong, all our good and evil are relative terms to be judged in relation to the individual and his duties. Nor can it be expected otherwise in this conditioned world. So he (Bhīṣma) suffers no qualifying words to be placed before the word *Dharma* to make it confined to a particular class of men, e. g., Hindu *Dharma*, Muslim *Dharma*, Sikh *Dharma* or Christian *Dharma*, etc. He simply says that *Dharma*, in its essentials, is one and the same

* ब्राह्मणानां यथा धर्मो दानमध्ययनं तपः ।
क्षत्रियाणां तथा कृष्ण समरे देहपातनम् ॥
पितॄन् पितामहान् भ्रातॄन् गुरुन् सम्बन्धिवान्धवान् ।
मिथ्याप्रवृत्तान् नः संख्ये निहन्याद् धर्म एव सः ॥

(M. E., S. P. 54. 14-15)

for all mankind. Of course, he admits that it assumes different names and forms at different stages of all the entities in the universe. For this reason, he may call it by different names such as Jaḍa-Dharma, Chetana-Dharma, Mānava-Dharma, Puruṣa-Dharma, Strī-Dharma, Vama-Dharma, Āsrama-Dharma, Rāja-Dharma, Prajā-Dharma, and so on and so forth. In short, to decide what is the *Dharma* of a particular person or thing we shall have to take into consideration the inner nature of the man or the thing, which he or it has achieved at a particular stage of his or its evolution as well as the mode or line of his or its further unfolding in the light and strength of that inner nature. He, like Śrī Kṛṣṇa* in the *Bhagavadgītā*, observes that it is not easy to say that such and such an action is always right or always wrong; for one and the same action may be right at one particular time and wrong at another. He, too, likewise believes that better one's own *Dharma*, though destitute of merit, than the *Dharma* of another well discharged. Better death in the discharge of one's own *Dharma*; for the *Dharma* of another is full of danger.†

A careful study of this long discourse, as well as of other Śāstras and scriptures, leads us to the conclusion that *Dharma* means that course of action or mode of life by which we may take a forward step along the onward march of our line of evolution. If analysed, this statement will be found to imply the following points:—

(1) All have a destined end or goal to reach in the long-drawn

journey of their Soul-life. This goal may be called by different names by different people. But for convenience's sake let us call it the *Parā Kāṣṭhā* or supreme perfection.

(2) All things and beings appear on the stage of the world-drama exhibiting or possessing a particular stage or state of nature acquired in their previous lives, ready to take up their fresh course of running their race towards the supreme goal, in the light of that nature acquired already.

(3) Evolution is the key-note of the whole universe. All things, from an atom to an angel, are in the course of evolution.

(4) As all beings instinctively want to enjoy happiness, which is found only in the state where happiness reigns supreme, that is, the state of supreme perfection, hence it becomes incumbent on them to take a progressive step forward and forward so long as their existence here on earth makes it possible for them.

(5) So long as they are making a progressive march along their own line of evolution, they are following their respective *Dharma*.

(6) The moment they take a retrogressive step or deviate a little from the right course, they fall from their Ideal of life and hence shall have to suffer for this Adharmic step of theirs.

(7) For a rule of perfect law, order and justice reigns supreme in the whole universe. Every cause must have its effect, and every effect must be due to a cause.

(8) Having the above-mentioned points in view, it is both *Dharma* and interest of man to study this Divine Law of Cause and Effect so devotedly that he may be able to follow it in all his undertakings.

* किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।

तत्रे कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्षयसेऽशुभात् ॥ (Gita IV.)

† श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ (Ibid. III. 35)

(9) In order to guide his life intelligently in accordance with these points, it is absolutely necessary for him to attain perfect control over his lower self, that is, his body, mind and *Buddhi*.

(10) He should have a firm and unshakable faith in the existence of this goal, which in religious parlance may be termed God or Truth, and believe that He is Beauty, Love, Peace, Justice, Bliss, Knowledge, All-pervading, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Beginningless and Endless and the Source of all life and form.

(11) In order to attain this goal, he shall have to imbibe the principles of Universal Brotherhood of man, beasts, and things, and Fatherhood of God.

The limited space at our disposal does not permit us to elucidate and illuminate these points a bit more; but in order to make our thesis intelligible to all, even to a layman, we add a few words by way of explanation of the last two points taken together.

The tenth point establishes that one and one entity alone stands as the root cause of all the variety visible in the universe. But the naked eye of man does not corroborate this fact. Evidently* everybody sees and feels that water differs from fire, and fire differs from air; a stone differs from a blade of grass, and grass differs from an animal; and there is a vast difference between an animal and a man. Of course, it is so; but we should bear in mind that it is our superficial knowledge. If we go a bit deeper, we shall see that things are not what they seem to be. The advanced science of these

* But, in fact, they are mere modifications of one Principle, as the Upanishads say:—

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः । आकाशाद्वायुः ।
वायोरग्निः । अग्नेरापः । अद्भ्यः पृथिवी, and so on.

days has proved beyond doubt that all the so-called elements are reducible into one; and that one, too, is no longer an atom or an indivisible entity, but a mere force. Of course, formerly it was believed that atoms are indivisible, and that different elements have separate atoms. But modern science has proved that all sorts of different atoms may be reduced into one primordial substance, from which all the varying forms of Matter have been evolved or built up. The primordial particles are called Electrons and Protons, that is, negative and positive poles of electricity, a mere force of course. So is our Mathematics—the science of space and numbers—based on the zero and the point, which has no magnitude. Linguistically, too, we come to know that the eight parts of speech upon which the structure of our boasted science of language has been built, are reducible to one part of speech, that is, the Noun or the Sustantive; for all the remaining parts of speech are only a necessity created for the Noun. And what is a Noun? A mere name for a thing. And what is a thing itself? A mere combination of some qualities such as length, breadth, height, thickness, roughness, smoothness, colour, etc.,—all mere abstract nouns or notions having no concrete existence. These qualities, bearing different names and forms, undergo changes with the change in the thing itself. Take for instance a stick of sugar cane: It loses its name and form as soon as it is changed into *rasa* or juice; but it indicated in its former state that there was a thing called sugar cane, it asserted itself on us and had its usefulness or was liked by some men and beasts. Now, when it is changed to juice, it loses its name and form and is now called Juice. The juice, too, in its turn has its particular name and form, has its existence, asserts its existence on others, and is liked by men and beasts, etc. Similarly, if

juice be changed into sugar candy and sugar candy into sweets, etc., we can easily see that names and forms disappear at each change, and that the three predicates will always remain intact, with all the changes. That is, a thing has its existence, asserts itself upon us, and is liked by us. This proves that names and forms are all an unreality, a chimera, a wild-goose chase, a *Māyā*, and the three predicates are a reality, the background upon which all the changes are carved. And what are these predicates ? Existence, Assertion, and Usefulness or Agreeableness, that is, *Asti*, *Bhāti*, *Priyo bhavati*, when translated into Sanskrit. Philosophically speaking, they are *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ānanda*, or Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. And whose attributes are these if not of *Brahma*—the Absolute, the Lord and God of all that is, that was and that shall be ? This is the Truth that stands at the root of all. Just as innumerable sparks flow out from a burning fire, so flow from this Eternal Truth all thoughts, all actions, all existences; and to Him alone they return after their race is run.*

If we have grasped the foregoing passage, we are bound to conclude that this one Eternal Entity has two aspects in itself, one changeable and the other unchangeable. The changeable is called its *Aparā Prakṛti* or Lower Nature; and the unchangeable is termed as *Parā Prakṛti* or the Higher or Absolute Nature.

And this changeable Nature could not have undergone any change had there been no differentiating factors

inherent in it. Without these differentiating factors no change is possible. Hence we are bound to conclude that there must be at least three, and three only, aspects in it.

These can easily be inferred from our own states that we have to assume from day to day. Early in the morning, just after a sound and peaceful sleep we feel a state of rest, peace, and illumination. After a while, when we go about our business, we assume a state of activity; and at night when we go to bed, we show a state of inertia and forgetfulness. This is a mere logical conclusion that every thinking mind must come to. So the seers of India by their intuitional powers have declared that the so-called Matter is reducible into three *guṇas* or attributes, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The word 'Guṇa' is the noun form of the verb 'Guṇ', which means to multiply. Hence this ever-changing principle has three *guṇas*, which by their combination and permutation multiply it into innumerable names and forms.

By the way, here we may touch upon an important point. These non-changing and ever-changing principles or aspects of *Brahma*, that form the Universe, have no line of demarcation. We cannot say that so much area is occupied by the ever-changing and so much by the non-changing. They are so much intermixed that we can never separate them in our ordinary course of life.

They are inseparably co-existent, co-eternal, but not co-extensive; for had they been co-extensive also, they would have been co-equal as well and then neither of them would have a control or supremacy over the other, and hence there would have been no creation at all; for in creation, we see a controlling hand visible everywhere, in man and beast quite palpably, and in other

* तदेतत्सत्यम् । यथा सुदीप्तात्पावकाद्विस्फुलिङ्गाः

सहस्रशः प्रभवन्ते सरूपाः ।

तथाक्षराद्विधाः सोम्य भावाः

प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवाभियन्ति ॥

(*Mundākopaniṣad* II. i. I.)

creatures lower than these somewhat vaguely or dimly. And there are reasons for that, which we do not like to discuss here. In short, this non-changing principle covers the ever-changing one, while the changing one does not cover the other.

Let us, for brevity's sake, call these non-changing and ever-changing aspects *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* respectively henceforth. So in conclusion all forms that exist in this universe are the combinations of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, Spirit and Matter.

If such is the case, then why does man differ from beast, the beast from the vegetable, and the vegetable from the mineral world? The difference is only apparent and not real. Just as a full-grown wise man seems to differ from a young lad, and a lad from an infant apparently only; while actually everybody knows that the full-grown man was a child once, and so was the child, a baby in its turn; and the same baby has grown up into childhood, and from childhood into manhood. The difference in their consciousness is due not to some intrinsic nature of consciousness, for consciousness is ever the same, but to different states or stages of development of the body through which the consciousness expresses itself. In other words, all things whatsoever are but means of manifestation of the Supreme Self's multifarious powers. This may be summed up in the following terse but beautiful words: "Minerals grow, plants grow and live; animals grow, live and feel." Or in other words, "God sleeps in the minerals, dreams in the vegetables, wakes in the animals, and looks before and after and knows Himself in man." The modern science is also now obliterating the line of demarcation between the so-called animate and inanimate objects. The late Dr. J. C. Bose's experiments have proved that very well, though the old

Aryan literature is full of this statement.*

So all Nature is living and God is the source of all life. Sāyaṇāchārya in his commentary of the *Rgveda* says:—

"God, who is *Sat, Chit, Ānanda* (Existence, Consciousness and Bliss) and who is the source of all existence, is present in all forms of man or beast, vegetable or stone, etc."†

All this leads to the conclusion that here are innumerable divisions and sub-divisions of man having different mental tendencies, moods and temperaments subject to the predominance of any one of these three *Guṇas*; for no creation is possible so long as they are in equipoise or equilibrium. So it is absolutely impracticable to compass *Dharma* in some hard and fast rules suitable to all and sundry. Our ancestors, the Ṛṣis of yore, have broadly divided it into two forms—*Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*, that is merging into the so-called ocean of Matter for the sake of gaining experience for which the *Jīva* has been sent down here, and then emerging out of it successfully to reach perfection.

And they also took care that this merging into the Matter should be so

* For life in plants see *Mahabharata, Shanti-Parva* III., of which one verse is given below:—

सुखदुःखयोश्च ग्रहणाच्छिन्नस्य च विरोहणात् ।
जीवं पश्यामि वृक्षाणामचैतन्यं न विद्यते ॥

"The fact that trees and plants have a sensation of pleasure and pain and parts thereof that are lopped off grow again, shows that there is life in them and that they are not insentient."

† सच्चिदानन्दरूपस्य जगत्कारणस्य परमात्मनः कार्यभूताः सर्वेऽपि पदार्थाः आविर्भावोपधयः । तत्राचलेषु मृत्पाषाणादिषु सत्तामात्रमाविर्भवति । न चात्मनो जीवरूपत्वम् ॥ ये तु ओषधिवनस्पतयः जीवरूपाः स्वावराः । ये च श्वासप्राणधारिणो जीवरूपा जङ्गमाः । ते उभये अतिशयेनाविर्भावस्थानम् ॥

(*Aitareya Aranyaka* II. 3. 5.)

arranged that emerging out of it may be as easy as possible. For the solution of this intricate and difficult problem, they have evolved out a very beautiful principle of *Adhikāra-Bheda* and *Varnāśrama-Dharma*. According to this principle, a man has to follow that very *Dharma* which his inner and inherent nature bids him do. Of course, an 'onward march' is the one essential condition, and in the light of this principle one has to carry as much burden as he is capable of carrying.

And the *Smṛtis* form a very detailed and complicated codification to assign Dharmic rules for different periods, and for different times and occasions. This, of course, is the speciality of the Aryan Hindus.* Space does not permit us to go into details; for this the reader is referred to *Manusmṛti* and other scriptures on this subject.

Of course, this much is necessary to say that if we have fully imbibed these *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti* Dharmas, we shall be able to account for so many restrictions, prohibitions, and other variations which apparently seem to be meaningless. They are based on reason and in the interest of those upon whom they are imposed. They are not an outcome of enmity, prejudice or any other baser motives as many ignorant people seem to think. But all the same, these different paths lead to one and one goal alone, that is, the attainment of Perfection.†

* प्रवृत्तिरोधको वर्णधर्मः ।

प्रवृत्तिपोषकश्चापरः । (अपरः=आश्रमधर्मः)

उभयोपेता आर्षजातिः ।

तद्विपरीता अनार्याः ।

(*Karma-Mīmāṃsā*)

† सिद्धे शब्दार्थसम्बन्धे लोकतोऽर्थप्रयुक्ते शास्त्रेण क्रियते धर्मनियमः । यथा खेदात् स्त्रीषु प्रवृत्तिर्भवति, समानश्च खेदविगमो गम्यायामगम्यायाच्च । तत्र नियमः क्रियते इयं गम्या इयमगम्येति ।

(*Mahabhashya*)

So *Dharma* with the Hindus was not a particular system of thought or Faith, a belief or creed, but a commonwealth of all systems and faiths; or, in other words, it is a vast University or Educational Seminary, having many departments, classes, and grades under it, all tending to lead their alumni to the portal of the Home of Bliss, but through many doors and avenues.

Now, a few stray remarks more, and I have done. *Dharma*, in fact, is not an article of faith in a particular form or dogmas, gods or prophets. It is both an art and a science of life. It is not a thing of believing but a thing of living and acting. It is not confined to one particular language or country. The language of spirit, that is 'Parā' is its language, and heart is the place where it finds a congenial soil for its growth.

To confine *Dharma* to one particular Faith, to one particular prophet, to one particular country, to one particular language, and to one particular scripture, is the very negation of *Dharma*. One who says so, betrays his ignorance of the secrets of religion or *Dharma*. It makes God partial and unjust. How can it be possible that our merciful Father, who has provided man with all sorts of physical and mental necessities and comforts in all countries and climes and times, can deprive him of the very means which go to satisfy his spiritual appetite? A man who has got an insight into the true nature of *Dharma*, will never utter such a blasphemy.

"For a grown-up man or woman, it is but natural to feel the force of animal tendencies of meeting the opposite sex in conjugal relation, and this natural craving can easily be satisfied by meeting with anybody and everybody that happens to come in his or her way. But in order to put a check upon these beastly proclivities, the Rishis have made a codification as to which hand he or she should adopt and which reject. Had there been no codification, man's or woman's unchecked lower passions could have run mad into a beastly level.

Then why do people hold that theirs alone is the true religion, and theirs only the true prophet, while all others are false? Simply because they have got no eye to grasp the whole picture. The well-known story of some blind men and an elephant is an illustration in point.

To confine Religion in this way is to obstruct our natural growth, to narrow our vision, and ultimately to deprive ourselves of *Bhūmā*, the full self-expansion. How well Pope says:—

*Slave to no sect, who takes no private road,
But looks through Nature, up to Nature's
God.*

(*Essay on Man*)

We have already said that religion is both a science and an art of life. By this we mean to say that Religion is not a mere belief in a few cut and dried set of rules or theories handed down to us from our ancestors through books and prophets, but it is a course of life through which a man has to pass in order to fulfil his mission of life, which is to find, or to express, the Divinity in humanity, that is, to live the life in such a way that it may be a perfect work of art and beauty, love and purity, peace and prosperity, vigour and virtue, light and delight, rhythm and rhyme. Of course, Faiths and Beliefs, Principles and Prophets, Books and Scriptures, may serve us as a guide in the beginning, provided they are followed with an open, unprejudiced and generous mind. But mere faith without work is dead; and when a man will work out certain principles in his practical life in the spirit of a true seeker after Truth, he is bound to be ushered into higher and newer planes of Truth. Hence Religion is not a static but a dynamic force. It is never a thing stationary, but always progressive. A really religious man will never keep sticking to some particular set

of dogmas, which he has inherited from his birth and other circumstances, but will go on shifting from one stage to another as the hidden side of things reveal to him from time to time. These stages do not serve him as the point of destination but as rungs of a ladder, which he must leave behind as he ascends higher and higher. Nor should he look down upon those he has left behind as something undesirable, but he will leave them as their work is over and his onward march does not need them, feeling at the same time that they are indispensable to others following him as they had been to him.

This does not imply at all conversion from one religion to another. In ordinary cases, there is no need for this. There is ample scope for realizing new, higher and sublimer meanings hidden behind the so-called rituals, in almost all religions. The real life of religion is detachment from worldliness and attachment to godliness; and various ways and means to this, such as prayers, fasts, pilgrimages, austerities, etc., have been prescribed by almost all religions in their own ways. God was kind enough to send His Messengers to all countries and climes for the guidance of men living there, just in keeping with their nature or the stage reached by them. They all deserve respect and honour at our hands, whether we follow their creed or not, for the simple reason that they were messengers from God whom we, too, adore. God is the Lord of all sects and denominations.* He knows better than any of us, as to where a particular soul is to be sent for its future uplift. All religions are God's creation; for how could one particular way of thinking manifest the Unlimited. It is a sheer folly to

* Hindus call Him *Vishwambhara*, Lord of all; while the Mohammedans call Him *Rab-ul-abmin*, Lord of all sorts of creatures.

hate other people or sister faiths. To do so is to denounce and deny God. He fulfils Himself in many ways. He makes no differentiation between man and man, clan and clan, sect and sect, so far as their spiritual side is concerned. This we see in our daily life. Has He ever withheld rain, sunshine, air or any free gifts of His from a Hindu simply because he is a Hindu. Then why should a Muslim hate a Hindu when God, his Lord, does not hate him. Is it not a blasphemy pure and simple? If God is everywhere, as many Muslim saints declare, is He not present in a Hindu? Is a Hindu body outside the jurisdiction of the Muslim God? How beautifully Shaikh Sadi has said that all men are the limbs of the one and the same body, for all are one in their origin! And so should a Hindu be hostile to no Muslim or non-Hindu. This is the true view of religion. Without this view, religion is a false creed created by the Satan in Man (selfish nature), and those who follow it, follow Satan and not God.

What a noble view of religion is this! This will put a stop to all religious tension, all religious controversies, all religious bickerings,—in fact, all crusades that we wage, and all horrors that we perpetrate nowadays in the name of religion. Of course, we should help another fellow-passenger with our personal experiences, when we see him come to a point where he stands in need of help. But this help should be by way of a suggestion and not in the form of a criticism and discussion. Never try to thrust your own views upon others, but simply try to awaken in them a higher consciousness by virtue of which they may be able to see the Truth for themselves.

This view, dear readers, is bound to end all our present religious hatred

and bigotry, which is the cause of so much bloodshed and horror. The good turn that an advanced soul owes to his less advanced brother or sister, is to put him on the right track, little regarding what he eats or drinks, knows or believes.

In short, my conviction is getting stronger and stronger that every religion has got in it truth enough to guide a particular country or a community at a particular stage of its spiritual evolution. Just as all sorts of waters in their simple and unalloyed state have an essential quality of quenching thirst, all cereals of food have life-promoting properties, especially for those people who live in that clime where they grow, so all religions have much of what is essential or common for all mankind. It is the non-essentials where they differ and this differing of theirs is also essential; for different countries and nationalities, on account of their climatic and geographical influences, must differ in various things, and the non-essentials, as we see by our daily experiences, depend mainly on climatic and various other factors and circumstances.

Here a question may arise: "Have all religions an equal amount of Truth?" Our answer is 'No'; for we have already said that all human truth is relative truth. Absolute truth is an impossibility in this world of conditions. But this much is certain that the truth a particular religion has, is quite sufficient to guide its adherents to a certain point whence, if the aspirant has acquired the required amount of mastery over those trainings for which he was placed there, he must take to the next higher step in the scale of evolution, either in this very birth or in the next one.

Believe that there are no happy-go-lucky happenings in this universe of Law and Order. An omnipresent and

omniscient Lord rules over it with a wise and far-reaching hand.

Here, again, a question may be asked: "If such is the case, then there should be no teaching and preaching of religion." My answer to this is that teaching and preaching are always indispensable. But teaching and preaching should not remain confined to a mere conformity to, and confirmation of, certain rules and rituals, but it should mean the realization of Truths hidden behind these formalities of rituals and ceremonies. Even in the limited circle of a particular religion there must be men and women who require this sort of training and preaching. This one should do without throwing mud or casting aspersions on other sister religions, as is being generally done these days.

One should try to see the beauty and merit in every religion. And surely religions, like other things in Nature, are not void of beauty. And how could they be so? Is not the Lord present in all things? and is He not all Beauty? How well the well-known saint of Ajmer has said that His glory is present everywhere; it is the eye that is missing to realize His glory!

Alas, how blinded we human beings are nowadays by our prides and prejudices, that we see nothing but what is bad in a religion other than our own! How bad it is to draw first a caricature of a religion and then criticize it! Believe, dear readers, if you have faith in God, a living and genuine faith, of course, there is beauty in variety. There is homogeneity behind this seeming heterogeneity. Each religion, like so many things in Nature, has a place in the economy of Mother Nature. The wise PROVIDENCE knows better than anybody else as to where to place a particular person or soul for his religious and spiritual uplift.

When a man has fully assimilated what his own religion has to teach him, and if he is not satisfied with it, he will instinctively leave it to take up another as a grazing cow instinctively leaves one patch of ground for another. Truth after Truth will unfold itself, just as a path on a misty morning reveals itself to a wayfarer, from step to step. All that goes by the name of Conversion, Shuddhi or Tabligh, is nothing but the inevitable consequence of a false conception of religion. The sooner we get rid of it, the better it is for the social, political, and spiritual growth of humanity. Are we wiser than God that we should interfere with His plan? We, puny fellows, have no plumb to fathom the depth of the mystery of this intricate plot of the drama of Universe. How well has Pope, the great poet, said:—

*All Nature is but an art unknown to thee,
All chance, direction which thou canst not see,
All discord, harmony not understood,
All partial evil, universal good.*

So, the Merciful Father has given a full chance to each and every soul to make the best use of the given opportunity, and one opportunity fully realized and utilized will lead him to another and greater opportunity.

This is what I mean by *Dharma* or Religion. My conviction is that if each and every man will follow his own religion in this spirit, surely he will feel the stream of real Dharmic life flowing into himself. A true Hindu, a true Muslim, and a true Christian will shake hands with one another as brothers or sons of the same Father. It is the pseudo-religionists that quarrel over names and forms, bricks and flags, and music and songs. May He, the Almighty Father of us all, open our inner eyes to see His Light and Beauty, Grandeur and Glory, in all things, in all names, and in all forms.
