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## PART 1

# The Universality, Necessity, and Oneness of Religion

### The Common Goal of Life

First we must know what religion is; then only may we judge whether it is necessary for all of us to be religious.

Without necessity there is no action. Every action of ours has an end of its own for which we perform it. People of the world act variously to accomplish various ends; there is a multiplicity of ends determining the actions of men in the world.

But is there any common and universal end of all the actions of all the people of the world? Is there any common, highest necessity for all of us, which prompts us to all actions? A little analysis of the motives and ends of men's actions in the world shows that, though there are a thousand and one proximate or immediate ends of men in regard to the particular calling or profession that they take up, the ultimate end—which all other ends merely subserve—is the avoidance of pain and want, and the attainment of permanent Bliss. Whether we can permanently avoid pain and want, and obtain Bliss, is a separate question; but as a matter of fact, in all our actions we obviously try to avoid pain and to gain pleasure.

Why does a man serve as an apprentice? Because he wishes to become an expert in a certain

business. Why does he engage in that particular business? Because money can be earned therein. Why should money be earned at all? Because it will satisfy personal and family wants. Why should wants be fulfilled? Because pain will thereby be removed and happiness be gained.

As a matter of fact, happiness and Bliss are not the same thing. We all aim at Bliss, but through a great blunder we imagine pleasure and happiness to be Bliss. How that has come to be so will be shown presently. The ultimate motive is really Bliss, which we feel inwardly; but happiness—or pleasure—has taken its place, through our misunderstanding, and pleasure has come to be regarded as the ultimate motive.

Thus we see that the fulfillment of some want; removal of some pain, physical or mental, from the slightest to the acutest; and the attainment of Bliss form our ultimate end. We may not question further why Bliss is to be gained, for no answer can be given. That is our ultimate end, no matter what we do—enter a business, earn money, seek friends, write books, acquire knowledge, rule kingdoms, donate millions, explore countries, look for fame, help the needy, become philanthropists, or embrace martyrdom. And it will be shown that the seeking of God becomes a real fact to us when our true end is kept rigorously in view. Millions may be the steps, myriad may be the intermediate acts and motives; but the ultimate motive is always the same—to attain permanent Bliss, even though it be through a long chain of actions.

Man usually likes to go along the chain to get to the final end. He may commit suicide to end

some pain, or perpetrate murder to get rid of some form of want or pain or some cruel heart-thrust, thinking he will thereby attain a real satisfaction or relief, which he mistakes for Bliss. But the point to notice is that here, too, is the same working (though wrongly) toward the ultimate end.

Someone may say, "I do not care anything about pleasure or happiness. I live life to accomplish something, to achieve success." Another says: "I want to do good in the world. I do not care whether I am in pain or not." But if you look into the minds of these people, you will find that there is the same working toward the goal of happiness. Does the first man want a success that has in its achievement no pleasure or happiness? Does the second want to do good to others, yet himself get no happiness in doing it? Obviously not. They may not mind a thousand and one physical pains or mental sufferings inflicted by others, or arising out of situations incidental to the pursuit of success or the doing of good to others; but because the one finds great satisfaction in success, and the other intensely enjoys the happiness of doing good to others, the former seeks success, and the latter seeks others' good, in spite of incidental troubles.

Even the most altruistic motive and the sincerest intention of advancing the good of humanity, for its own sake, have sprung from the basic urge for a chastened personal happiness, approaching Bliss. But it is not the happiness of a narrow self-seeker. It is the happiness of a broad seeker of that "pure self" that is in you and me and all. This happiness is Bliss, a little alloyed. So with pure Bliss as a personal motive for altruistic action, the altruist is not

laying himself open to the charge of narrow selfishness, for one cannot himself have pure Bliss unless he is broad enough to wish and seek it for others, too. That is the universal law.

### **A Universal Definition of Religion**

So, if the motives for the actions of all men are traced farther and farther back, the ultimate motive will be found to be the same with all—the removal of pain and the attainment of Bliss. This end being universal, it must be looked upon as the most necessary one. And what is universal and most necessary for man is, of course, religion to him. Hence, *religion necessarily consists in the permanent removal of pain and the realization of Bliss, or God.* And the actions that we must adopt for the permanent avoidance of pain and the realization of Bliss or God are called religious. If we understand religion in this way, then its universality becomes obvious. For no one can deny that he wants to avoid pain permanently and attain permanent Bliss. This must be universally admitted, since none can gainsay its truth. Man's very existence is bound up with it.

All want to live because they love religion. Even if a man committed suicide it would be because he loved religion, too; for by doing that he thinks he will attain a happier state than he finds while living. At any rate, he thinks he will be rid of some pain that is bothering him. In this case his religion is crude, but it is religion, just the same. His goal is perfectly right, the same that all persons have; for all of them want to obtain happiness, or Bliss. But his means is unwise. Because of his ignorance, he does not know what will bring him to Bliss, the goal of all men.

### **What It Means to Be Religious**

Thus, in one sense every man in the world is religious, inasmuch as everyone is trying to get rid of want and pain, and to gain Bliss. Everyone is working for the same goal. But in a strict sense only a few in the world are religious, for only a few in the world, though they have the same goal as all others, know the most effective means for removing, permanently, all pain or want—physical, mental, or spiritual—and gaining true Bliss.

The true devotee cannot hold a rigidly narrow orthodox conception of religion, though that conception is, in a remote way, connected with the conception I am bringing out. If for some time you do not go to church or temple, or attend any of its ceremonies or forms, even though acting religiously in your daily life by being calm, poised, concentrated, charitable, squeezing happiness from the most trying situations, then ordinary people of a pronounced orthodox or narrow bent will nod their heads and declare that, although you are trying to be good, still, from the point of view of religion, or in the eyes of God, you are “falling off,” as you did not of late enter the precincts of the holy places.

While of course there cannot be any valid excuse for permanently keeping away from such holy places, there cannot, on the other hand, be any legitimate reason for one's being considered more religious for attending church, if at the same time one neglects to apply in daily life the principles that religion upholds, that is, those that make ultimately for the attainment of permanent Bliss. Religion is not dovetailed with the pews of the church, nor is