

WHY RELIGION?

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Before we discuss whether we need a religion or not, let us try to understand what we mean by religion.

Leaving aside the dictionary and sophisticated meanings, according to common understanding and parlance, religion is our belief of a purpose in life, and our actions in pursuit of that purpose. This belief or beliefs as we notice them today to be of different kinds, must have evolved to what they are today from a very primitive stage when man believed and lived no better than other animals observing the jungle law of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and eating, sleeping and dying. He lived in mortal fear of natural phenomena such as the thunder, lightning, winds, the sun and the moon.

According to some thinkers, the conception of religion or religious ideas in man had its origin in the feeling of terror, resulting in nature worship. According to others, it originated out of the feeling of wonder or awe.

With the development of his reasoning powers, he began to discover nature’s laws and learnt the rudiments of various sciences such as cooking, implements making, animal husbandry and agriculture. This was the pastoral age, and we learn man then came to live in communities, and he began to contrive rules of behaviour for his own well-being and towards each other in the community. Man at this stage had not as yet lost his intuition – a power in man just as in animals to know what is good for it and what is not. It is intuition that makes the new-born baby to yearn for milk. Religion must have dawned on the mind of man in the same way. Some have held that religion or anything worthy of that name originated in man with the thought of a second existence beyond this existence which they sensed as a temporary world. Animism, spiritualism and ancestor-worship originated in man with this thought of a second existence beyond the grave. If we examine closely the sources of the different religious systems of the world, we will notice that they have for source any one or two or all three namely the feeling of terror, the feeling of wonder or awe and the conception of a second existence as the impetus for their respective evolution and development. In the thought of a second existence, he hopes to have everlasting happiness.

Reason came to play its part in the wake of intuition just as in all other scientific discoveries of man, and he began to analyse his beliefs. Seers and prophets appeared on the scene in helping man to put his facts right in respect of his life on earth and the hereafter.

And when man had attained to be a fully reasoned animal we find various schools of thought in religion manifesting themselves. Some religions announce a belief in the existence of many Gods or aspects of God or Saints to be invoked for help in our distress, while others proclaim one and only God as the creator of the world and man. Some of these religions claim to have been revealed by God himself to prophets or incarnations of God. Agnostic schools of thought proclaim that we can know no more than what is evident in our senses in this world. The unseen God or Gods are therefore to be rejected. The belief put forward in the religion known as Buddhism is unique. It believes in a past life as the cause for this existence, and man that himself creates his hereafter without the aid of a Creator.

Every religion consists of a theory and practice just as any other art subject. (The higher reaches of the theory of religion dabbles in philosophy which is the knowledge of the causes and laws of all phenomena in the physical plane and in some religions in the metaphysical plane as well). When we delve into the philosophical phase of religion, for the most part it is our reasoning faculty that comes into play and not the intuition or emotion, although some think that intuition is the fulfilment of reason. It should be plain to anyone that it should be the other way round. Our reason or rationality is the fulfilment of intuition and we, especially of this age, should expect our religion to appeal to our reason in all respects and not so much to traditional beliefs based on intuition or emotion or superstition.

A study of comparative religions will show that the major living religions of today namely, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are all teaching men to go in search of real happiness and in order to realize same, we have to do good and to eschew evil. All of them show the conditions of life in this world are more or less unsatisfactory and therefore we ought to strive for a better state or place of life in a heaven, or nirvana.

The ways and means to get to this better state or place of life as shown in the different religions differ one from the other, the explanations given for our present existence also differ from each religion. The teachings of one religion may be appealing to some while the teachings of another may be appealing to others. It seems as if the different religions are of different standards to suit different stages of development of the mind and therefore the great need for tolerance of each other's religion.

By now one should be able to realize that religion is a biological necessity just as much as food for the stomach. If we have all our material needs satisfied, we still hunger for knowledge of our present existence and the hereafter. If we wantonly refuse to have a religion we still shall be forced to fill the vacuum with an ideology of a materialistic nature such as communism or free thinking. Even if one claims to be a communist or a free-thinker it is to be conjectured today when religious thoughts or ideas have permeated nearly all fields of knowledge, whether he

does not unconsciously succumb to such. The very fact that barbarism which was rife before is scarcely evident in any part of the world today is a clear indication that religion is abroad.

We talk of civilization and picture a civilized man or nation. What is it that has lifted man from barbarism to civilization? Surely we have to agree that it is religion that has been chiefly instrumental in recovering man from his animal nature. Within living memory we have seen how pockets of rabid cannibalism that existed in some parts of the world have been changed to peaceful and civilized areas with the advent of religion.

Man needs a religion as an anchorage as ships in a harbour. Human nature as we know is frail. How easily we can be lured away from a correct path in life, and therefore the need for aids to keep us steadfast and firm in our resolutions in pursuit of our ideals. When we have taken a religion, we more or less bind ourselves to its teachings and precepts and observances, thereby we are enabled to steer a straight course than otherwise as a free-thinker or a lone wolf. When we belong to a religion, we are influenced by crowd psychology to restrain from doing anything that goes against that religion. In other words, we are encouraged in our belief and practice by the presence of so many others holding to the same belief and practice. As ships moored in a harbour are able to weather strong winds and storms, we are also enabled to keep from the strong temptations that come to us to break away from the path we have set ourselves.

The whole of nature as we observe is composed of opposites – good-bad; rise-fall; joy-sorrow; birth-death; health-sickness; riches-poverty; prosperity-adversity etc. and we observe too that we are never free from the effects of these opposites. Life becomes trying at a time when we are experiencing an adverse condition in life like sickness or failure in our business or enterprise. It is at such time mostly that our religion is of greatest benefit. It gives us solace and acts as a balm in soothing our ruffled emotions. The philosophical teachings in religion then come to our help in bearing with the hardships we are encountering. Persons who have no religion to prop up their spirit at such times crack up often times and are admitted to lunatic asylums or they do some rash acts such as committing suicide.

If one is not unfortunate enough to end up this life in a sudden and tragic death, but lives to a good old age and dies a natural death, in the last moments he encounters an agony. Religion then comes to his aid in alleviating the pain of passing away. It comforts him and prepare his mind to realize the body to the world of matter. He, so to say, dies with a smile on his face.

Religion plays a great part in the governance of countries. There is less crime to control and greater loyalty is built up for the state. It offers a rallying force in times of emergency such as during natural calamities or in times of invasion by aggressors. Even when certain countries had to give up religion owing to the

growth of a distaste for it by the malpractices done in its name, by adopting communism, the vacuum still had to be filled up by spiritual ideology.

In history we find that very often with the deterioration of religion, nations have declined. As soon as the tenets of a religion are found to be not in keeping with advancing knowledge, a decline sets in blunting the intelligence of its adherents concurrently bringing about a decline of the nation.

Students in quest of knowledge will find the study of religion to be interesting even from an academical point of view, especially so if the religion under study is full of rich lore of the workings of the body and mind and the universe that conforms with the latest discoveries of science. Such a study offers fresh vistas for exploration. The study of comparative religion helps to broaden one's outlook and to break down barriers of caste, colour and race and to build a common brotherhood of all nations of the world.

In recent years we have noticed the growth of multi-religions in many countries. This is undoubtedly a break away from the past when every country took pride in a State religion and zealously guarded it, even fighting fanatical wars in defence of it or to propagate it. This tendency of the modern age to tolerate various religions in a nation or country is a happy sign of the maturing of religious thought in man. This should help each religion to be put on its feet for the well-being of man. We should expect as a result of this move an advancement in the practice of the religious fundamentals of love, tolerance and compassion amongst all peoples of the world.

DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

What is religion? How often has the question been asked. Its import conceived of in different ways, and, accordingly, variously answered: opinions of its nature and meaning are so numerous and conflicting that one despairs of arriving at any tangible agreement. Here are a few definitions given by various scholars.

OXFORD DICTIONARY: "System of faith and worship; human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience, effect of such recognition on conduct etc,"

BUTLER: "Religion implies a future state."

MATTHEW ARNOLD: "Religion is morality touched with emotion."

COMTE: "The worship of Humanity."

CARLYLE: “The thing a man does practically believe, the thing a man does lay practically to heart and knows for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious universe and his duty and destiny therein.”

RUSKIN: “Our national religion is the performance of Church ceremonies and preaching of soporific truths or untruths to keep the mob quietly at work while we amuse ourselves.”

J. S. MILL: “The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightly paramount over all selfish objects of desire.”

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: “Goodness rendering to God the honour due to Him.”

VOLTAIRE: “An absurdity to keep the multitude in subjection.”

ENGELS: “Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their early life.”

SIR E. RAY LANKESTER: “Religion means the knowledge of our destiny and of the means of fulfilling it. We can say no more and no less of science.”

PROF. WHITEHEAD: “Religion is what the individual does with his own solitude. If you are never solitary, you are never religious.”

ALDOUS HUXLEY: “Religion is, among many other things, a system of education, by means of which human beings may train themselves, first to make desirable changes in their own personalities and, at one remove, in society, and, in the second place, to heighten consciousness and so establish more adequate relations between themselves and the universe of which they are part

Modern Indian philosophers, like Dr. Radhakrishnan, have expounded eloquently the theme that religion is not a set of doctrines, but that it is an experience. And religious experience is based on the realization of the “Presence of the divine of man.”

One might easily quote a whole volume of definitions but each addition would serve only to make the issue more confused and uncertain. It is computed that there are about 1,580,000,000 people professing some kind of religion or other yet it is exceedingly questionable whether five per cent of that vast number could agree as to what fundamentally constitutes “Religion”.

In spite of the juxtaposition of ideas, the noblest and most comprehensive ideas on the matter were uttered by one whom the vulgar termed “Atheist” and “Infidel” – Thomas Paine. When almost hounded to death by his persecutors, he valiantly

said: "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion."

How puerile and vain seem the sophistical utterances of certain scholars when compared with the human philosophy of the great English reformer. "To do good": that is the sum-total of all religion, and yet how sadly lacking it is in what the multitude call "religion".

Thomas Paine is not singular in his definition of "religion." Two thousand three hundred years before him, the founder of a great religion not only defined "religion" in the same way as Paine did, by saying that it was:

"Refraining from all evil,
Practising of all that is good,
Living with a clean heart,"

but He also told mankind that the way to "worship" that religion of goodness was by:

"Annihilation of all Greed,
Extinction of all Hatred,
Liquidation of all Ignorance."

Amongst the founders of all religions, the definition of "religion" as given by this great Teacher – the Buddha is more comprehensive, reasonable, logical, scientific and yet so simple.

If anyone could follow this simple method introduced by this great Teacher there would not be any problem in this world.

VARIOUS TYPES OF RELIGION

A religion becomes known as a world religion when it has expanded beyond the country of its origin. Today we have five world religions. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. Religion, it must be said, is one of the few things that distinguishes man from all other beings. This is distinctively a human phenomenon, and therefore, should be treated humanly from a human point of view, with human feeling.

At the beginning, however, there was no such organization as we see today. With the passage of time, however, religion became institutional and organized. Today some of the religions of the world are not merely faiths that speak of man's salvation and the hereafter only, but have become whole civilizations with their institutions: social, educational, economic and even political.

Now we can understand that it is very hard to give a general definition of religion, since it is a very vast subject of various beliefs, thoughts, institutions, ceremonies, ecclesiastical organizations, practices and interpretations.

PERSONAL RELIGION means the inward veneration of one's religious teacher or teachers and the application of one's moral principles in one's daily life, without participating in the showy manifestations of the organized religion of the masses. Most of the educated classes belong to this category.

ORGANISED OR INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION is the popularly practiced religion of the masses, with much pomp, many ceremonies, processions and public worship. Temple festivals and public preachings, all-night-paritta-chanting are typical examples of Institutional Religion. The intellectual classes are not very much interested in this kind of religion, but the broad masses understand only this kind of religion. Buddhism satisfies all temperaments: to the intellectual classes it gives a lofty philosophy and moral teachings that lead to enlightenment and liberation from all suffering; to the common man it gives a gorgeous worship and a hope of life in heaven. Further, religion is subdivided into two main classes: revealed religion, and natural religion.

REVEALED RELIGION is one said to be revealed by 'God' through the Prophets or special messengers of 'God' or son of 'God'. The Hebrew, the Christian and the Moslem religions are counted as the typically revealed religions, and according to the light of the adherents of those religions, they are the only true religions. All three are monotheistic religions teaching but one God, though the Roman Catholic religion has yielded to the popular and more natural demand for more gods by introducing the belief in the intercession of the "Mother of God" and their Saints, the worship or adoration of the relics of the Saints, and still many other ways of approaching God and obtaining what one wants without having to ask it from the 'One God'.

NATURAL RELIGION or rather Natural Religions are, according to the Christian writers, all the other manifestations of religion. Natural Religion has been classified under three headings:-

PHYSICAL RELIGION, the worship of natural phenomena and forces, is said to have been inspired by the aspect of Nature. The first forms of physical religion might have been really inspired by the awe experienced in the presence of strong natural phenomena, such as mountains, rivers, the sea, earthquakes, thunderstorms, floods, and any violent changes in one's environment. Fear with

craving, and a desire to win the favour of the powers behind the natural phenomena, gave rise to the belief in gods, souls, spirits and mighty divine beings, and the possibility of incurring their displeasure or winning their favour.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL RELIGION is founded on the nature of man and leads to the worship of ancestors or the First Man, or a God, who is supposed to have been the originator of the imperial family and of all men. The Japanese and the Chinese are counted as adherents of this kind of religion, in so far as they do not count as Buddhists or adherents of other systems.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RELIGION is occupied with the study of the nature of the human soul and its relation to God. Though the Hindus declare that their religion is one revealed by God or successive incarnations of God, their religion is often counted among Psychological Religions, with admixtures of other forms of Natural Religion.

Buddhism is the greatest stumbling block for the scholars of Comparative Religion, for it does not fall under any single heading of all the categories of religions, though it contains elements of both the revealed and natural religions. It has been revealed by the Buddha, who is called The Teacher of Gods and Men. In course of time, Buddhism has assimilated elements of natural religions. We may now define Buddhism as the Truth attained and revealed by the Enlightened One and to be realized by each of us individually.

Though Free thinkers and Atheists and even Materialists at times acclaim the Buddha as one of their own, yet Buddhism is not an Atheistic Teaching, if the word atheism is used as a term of reproach and condemnation. Buddhism does not waste time in fighting against belief in God or the gods, though, when rightly understood, it supercedes all Theistic Doctrines. Buddhism, sometimes called 'Divine Atheism' may be called Supertheism or rather Supratheism.

The founders of many religions claimed to have received their message from a supposed god, but the Buddha is, in the scriptures of the Pali Tripitaka, represented as having taught in heaven, and convinced even the 'Most High Maha Brahman' of his delusion if he thinks that he is the Father of All. Though the common followers of the Enlightened One, or rather the worshippers of the Buddha, placed in this world of opposing forces, and factors, do at times expect help, collaboration and Protection from the gods, and for most of them any of the gods is God for them, yet these gods are treated as lay Buddhists, disciples of Buddha, and always anxious to protect the true follower of the Enlightened One, if he needs their protection. And in the Commentaries the 'devas' assume an increasingly important, benevolent and helpful role, till in later Buddhism the Buddha appears as the chief among them.

Buddhism is inspired by the aspect of suffering, and is the Path to the Liberation from all Suffering. The Buddha's quest for Enlightenment as motivated not by

fear or craving, but by the determination to solve the problem of suffering and to lead all intelligent beings to Liberation and Enlightenment. If fear has any place in Buddhism, it is the abhorrence of suffering; and if craving motivates religion, in Buddhism it is the striving for liberation and enlightenment that moves us to the application of the Dhamma in our daily lives. When knowing what people understand by 'religion' we avoid that word and call Buddhism by the original word DHAMMA.

H. G. WELLS says: "Religion is the central part in our education that determines our moral conduct." The famous German Philosopher Kant stated his definition of religion thus: "Religion is the recognition of our moral principles as laws that must not be transgressed." This comes quite near to Buddhist conception of what religion ought to be.

In a very broad sense, religion may be defined as a body of moral and philosophical teachings, and the acceptance with confidence of such a teaching. In this sense Buddhism is a religion and the Buddhists have indeed a very noble religion to follow.

If religion be a way of life founded upon the apprehension of sacredness in existence; if, as is the case, the human consciousness be not satisfied with the mere experiencing of sacredness and mystery, but attempts to link this up with its faculty of reason and its desire for right action trying on the one hand to comprehend the mystery and to explain the reality which it still feels sacred, and on the other to sanctify morality and make right action itself a sacrament; if this linking up of rational faculty and morality with the specifically religious experience of holiness has resulted in organizing the external ground of religion as what is usually called God; and if, finally, there be no reason for ascribing personality or pure spirituality to this God, but every reason against it; then religion becomes a natural and vital part of human existence, not a thing apart; a false dualism is overthrown; and the pursuit of the religious life is seen to resemble the pursuit of a scientific truth or artistic expression, as the highest of human activities, success in which comes partly from native gifts, partly from early training and surroundings, partly from sheer chance or sudden psychic change, and partly from continuous personal efforts.

True Buddhism, theoretically stated, is humanitarianism, meaning by that term something very like the gospel of humanity preached by the Positivist, whose doctrine is the elevation of man through human intellect, human intuition, human teaching, human experience, and accumulated human efforts – to the highest ideal of perfection.

If religion means only a system of faith and worship then this interpretation does not apply to Buddhism.

If on the other hand religion means a righteous way of living for man to seek his peace and happiness in this lifetime and hereafter then no controversy should arise as to whether he should have a religion or not, because after all everybody is seeking peace and happiness. Religious principles were adopted by man through his own experiences, trials and errors, which he had gained from the very beginning of human society. He had come to realize that a good action was followed by a good reaction and vice versa. Therefore religion came into existence to tell man how to live in this world in accordance with the cosmic law, by understanding what is good for him and what is bad thus he not only could find a way to his own peace and happiness but also could help others to live in peace.

Salvation, the ultimate goal or the purpose of life, can only be achieved by becoming a perfect being through following a religion. One may expect to find temporary happiness, or rather emotional satisfaction, through other sources, but certainly not everlasting happiness.

WHAT DOES RELIGION TEACH US?

Religion teaches us to overcome our difficulties without creating further difficulties. Every problem of life which we come across could be solved if only we know how to practise a rational religion.

Man has been endowed with certain extra faculties which animals do not have. If man does not train himself to utilize such faculties he is capable of behaving in a manner much worse than animals. He could train himself against the moral background introduced by a religion. But such religious instruction should be given not by threatening them with hell-fire nor by pleasing them by promising a paradise, but by making them to understand why they should observe morality and abstain from evil.

Human beings cannot be controlled by a government merely by imposing more and more rigid rules. The more the government makes the rules the more would people find out loopholes to break such rules. If man is morally trained by a religion so as to make him understand why he should behave as a good citizen, no problems would arise.

Religion always advises people not to practise any form of discrimination among members of the human society; but some religionists have acted quite contrary to this fundamental teaching and so divided human society in the name of religion. This is indeed a very sad thing.

It is only through religion that man can mould his life and destiny to adjust himself and not through any other means.

Religion teaches us how to conquer ourselves without depending on others. If every man could learn to do this through his own-power and intelligence then what a wonderful world this would be to live in peacefully and happily. Man should not blame religion for his own failure.

Religion teaches us not to become slaves even to our own senses; instead it teaches to calm them down in order to find the way to real happiness.

Religion again teaches us (without blaming anybody else) to try to understand our own weakness and to shoulder the responsibility of life by fulfilling our duties and obligations to ourselves as well as to others.

Religion tells us also that academical knowledge alone is insufficient for a person to develop his insight to find peace and happiness but that he has to develop his intelligence through self-training, discipline and restraint as well.

Tolerance, patience, and understanding have been advocated by religion whereby man could learn to live peacefully in this world, as otherwise he could descend to a position much worse than that of animals by creating trouble and disturbing others.

To those, who run after a mirage, not knowing the real nature of life and the universe, religion like Buddhism has given them a clear picture of things as they truly are.

The way of establishing peace on earth is not through force and compulsion, but through amity and compassion springing from one's inner heart; this has to be brought about by the study and practice of a religion which alone could show the way to extinction of hate, greed and ignorance.

Religion teaches us to return good for evil, overcome anger by love, miserliness by charity, and not by adopting any other unscrupulous or violent methods.

Religion further tells us that we are born to this world to do some good by performing humane services to others and by purifying ourselves in order to find out the ultimate goal of this life. Again, it says that man is the noblest living being. We will therefore be abusing the privileges we have attained if we do not prove ourselves worthy of the cause for which our merits have endowed us with our present exalted position as human beings.

Renunciation, detachment and contentment are the most essential things in a religion for a man to find out happiness; on the other hand religion also teaches us not to run away from the life-battle but to try and overcome difficulties by adopting a harmless method. Instead of becoming a slave to external sources, religion tells us to learn how to live in accordance with the universal law or cosmic order to realize a better life.

Religion advises us not to be moved or frustrated whenever we are carried away by the vicissitudes of rise and fall, success and failure, loss and gain, honour and contempt, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow, delight and despair, disappointment and satisfaction, fear and hope. Religion also teaches us how to face death with a smiling face without harbouring the slightest fear and to be prepared for the event since it is one which is unavoidable in life.

Religion advises us to sacrifice our comfort and even own lives for the sake of upholding good principles. One who tries to save himself by breaking his precepts and principles is the meanest person in this world.

People often think they could solve all their problems if only they could have money; but what they fail to realize is whether all those who have money could really manage to solve their problems. The more money people have, the more problems there will be for them to solve. But religion can solve all those problems without creating any further problems.

Our desire to progress towards a better world is inseparable from the urge to improve ourselves; and this self-improvement must be striven after by spiritual and intellectual development through a religion. It is not without danger to tabulate human progress in terms of material improvement alone. Without a corresponding spiritual advance, material improvement is only a means to an end and not an end in itself and hence will soon be regarded by those benefiting from them as insufficient.

Religion like Buddhism exhorts people to cultivate love, kindness, sympathy, compassion, goodwill and do noble deeds which serve as a health tonic as well as a heart tonic. A clean heart does good like an efficacious medicine.

Man has to adapt himself to this flow of life, and as a reward he could expect to find complete harmony. All of man's ills come from his crossing against life's currents. No man can cross the ocean in a sailing boat by defying the winds; he must learn to adjust his sails so as to use them to his advantage.

There are so many problems pertaining to this universe and life which science or any other sources cannot solve for us; but only in religion could we find a solution to all these problems.

The definition given by a rational religion like Buddhism regarding the universe and various aspects of life is "the Ultimate Truth". Something which was found out earlier as "Truth" by other sources had to change the definition of "truth" from time to time, because they had found only the superficial truth, but not the Whole Truth itself.

Man always has conflicts, with each other, conflicts with nature and conflicts with himself. This fact was pointed out by religion and so man was advised to be on the alert.

Amongst all religions, Buddhism attempts to achieve eternal harmony by a scientific, and deliberately planned process. Some religions say man is in conflict with God but Buddhism says it is not so, man in fact is in conflict with himself, and until this conflict is turned into harmony, there cannot be peace either within himself or without.

TEENAGERS AND RELIGION

All over the world young men and women more popularly known as teenagers, are taking less and less interest in religion irrespective of what group they may belong to. They tend to view scornfully the careful orthodox religious observances of their parents and regard such observances as being old-fashioned. The East is seeking the not-always-good examples of the West in this respect, and everywhere the eyes of the youth are turned towards science, which is slowly aspiring to be a substitute for Religion. All religions are equally affected by this attitude of mind and young parents often do not trouble to give any religious teachings to their children, so much so that in a generation or two, we could almost expect to see a giant test tube set up on an altar as a symbol of the God "Science", to which the passing students will perhaps nod as a slight show of respect.

Many educated and uneducated young people cannot agree with certain traditions, customs and rituals performed by their parents under the name of religion. Among these practices certainly there are some ridiculous things which a modern man cannot accept. It is meaningless therefore to force young people to practise such things; if they force them to do so the result will be either they turn away from all the religions or give up their parents' religion.

To fill up this gap, different types of new creeds and religious callings are being introduced; but they cannot give any fresh ideas which are not available in the existing main religions. Therefore our duty should be to practise the fundamental principles of established religions instead of trying to introduce some new fangled religious teachings.

When you read the newspapers you can hardly fail to notice how crime is on the increase and also how young the criminals are, often only teenagers, sometimes even younger, for recently mere children have been arrested for crimes of violence, including actual murder. Psychologists and science workers theorise on the feeling of insecurity that this modern age has given rise to and the after effects of the last Great War on the youth of today. But it would seem likely that the real cause is in the disbelief in a purpose in life and in anything higher for a

man to look forward to. The result is that they scorn at morality and religion on the one hand, and suffer from discontentment and unrest on the other.

Life is no longer an adventure. Man no longer can smell as well as a dog can. Only strong odours are perceived by him. The blind man develops a sensitivity of hearing of possibly something akin to a radar sense (which is highly developed in bats) which a normal man who relies on his eyes can never acquire.

In the same way the young of today are rapidly losing their capacity for natural enjoyment, that is for finding entertainment and interest in things, because of the man-made amusement provided for them. All this means not only loss of imaginative ability but discontentment, for they become dependent on their interest having to be provided for them from outside themselves, instead of they exerting themselves as their fathers did.

Hence life seems monotonous and discontentment is rife. The modern youth, therefore, seeks excitement by breaking laws and doing things to incite people and committing wanton crimes of violence. Discontentment is the basis of all crime and it is especially so marked today. But the discontentment is due – as nearly everything bad in the world is due – to a wrong sense of values, a wrong view point.

It therefore becomes necessary for us to ask ourselves what is our attitude to the religion in which we were brought up and which our parents set so much of their hearts in for us, and are we right in our judgment of it.

TWO ASPECTS OF RELIGION

There are two aspects in every religion, the outer and the inner. The outward aspect or form of religion consists of the observance, customs, and rituals, performed by laymen or by the priesthood. The inward aspect is the feeling you may have within yourself of something far greater than anything in the Universe, of a Purpose in your life, a Purpose in the world, of Something which makes you feel the significance of the words 'Ought' or 'Ought not', that you 'ought' to do certain things and 'ought not' to do others, that there is a goal at which you must aim, and that you are, at present, weak and ignorant but that you could develop yourself if only you try hard enough.

Now it is obvious that of these two aspects, only the outward one has to move with the times. The inner one cannot for already it is far ahead of the times; for the times, being irreligious on the whole, are not concerned with principles or ethics any more. Hence it is on the outer aspect of religion that the falling away of adherents is particularly noticeable, orthodoxy being flouted by the younger generation who sees no point in it. The inward aspect has never been much

considered, except by the very few down the ages. The great majority do not like the idea of self-conquest which it involves!

If we no longer believe that a lump of wood carved like an idol has any power to help or harm us, we shall cease to make offerings to it or prostrate ourselves before it and in all likelihood we shall finally chop it up for firewood! The crucial question to think about is – What would you put in its place instead.

Disregard of the outer aspect of religion may be the result of two causes. Either you have ceased to bother about values at all of leading a 'Good' rather than a 'bad' life, of nothing else except seeking pleasures in this world, or your feeling about the inner aspect has reached such a depth and strength that the outer aspect appears to you as childish toys, babbles and antics which are scarcely connected with religion at all.

The first of these causes naturally carry with it a disregard for the inner aspect of religion too, and leads to a complete lack of any religious feeling or care about anything except one's self and one's own pleasures. It is also breeding ground for forms of vice and cruelty. Having no sense of values one comes to have no feeling for one's fellowmen. The second of these causes carries with it a deepened sense of 'Religion', it is unconcerned with outward show but much concerned with inner development. The main thing, however, is to know exactly to which of the two our own disregard for religion belongs, for self deception is very easy and hypocrisy very pleasant.

On the other hand, those who have an affection for the outer aspect of religion must also examine themselves to see whether they may not be substituting forms and rituals for the inner aspect, a thing that not infrequently happens. Do we take an undue pleasure in prostrating ourselves before altars on the slightest pretext and do we set too much importance on placing gifts on them thinking to acquire merit thereby? And so we revel in forms of services and worship and make them ends in themselves.

Today the world is a very sick place. Men and women are rapidly sliding downhill to their own destruction, whilst imagining they are progressing to a civilization as yet undreamed of. There is much need for a religious revival for every existing religion to practise tolerance and goodwill towards each other. The followers of one religion should not think of the followers of another as damned or as infidels and as being inferior to themselves. The religions need reorientation in this inner aspect which alone runs through all religions, separated only from each other by their outward aspects.

This is worth thinking about. For if the inner aspect of all religions is the same, then it will hardly matter what outward forms you adopt to achieve the inner, or

whether your friend adopts a different one, that is whether you call yourself a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Christian, a Moslem or what else – at least it would not matter if only men could see that the outer aspect is but the means to a better realization of the inner aspect and it is not an end in itself. There would then be no religious labels and the like, and no one could shout ‘Infidel’ at another.

Religion is of the spirit, Inner Realization is its keynote and the “Kingdom of heaven” is within you. Here there can be no differences, no ground for intolerance, scorn, selfishness and persecution. Let the outer form keep pace with the times or else the inner form will perish with them. Only when the inner form is well established may we begin to see the Brotherhood of man that which people talk so much about.

“Religion merges into mysticism and metaphysics and philosophy ” says Pandit Nehru in his “Discovery of India”. “There have been great mystics, attractive figures, who cannot easily be disposed of as self-deluded fools. Yet mysticism (in the narrow sense of the word) irritates me; it appears to be vague and soft and flabby, not a vigorous discipline of the mind but a surrender of mental faculties and a living-in-a-sea of emotional experience. The experience may lead occasionally to some insight into inner and less obvious processes, but is also likely to lead to self-delusion. The modern man is wrapped up much more in things external, and yet even he, in moment of crisis and mental entanglement often turns to philosophy and metaphysical speculations.”

DUTY OF A RELIGION

In this mighty effort to seek peace and happiness the world’s religions have the greatest part to play, not in competition with each other but in very close collaboration.

The only way to achieve real peace is to eliminate the root-cause of war – greed, hatred and stupidity. The world cannot have peace until men and nations renounce selfish desire, give up racial arrogance, the egoistical lust for possession and power. Wealth cannot secure happiness. It is religion alone that can effect the necessary change of heart and bring about the disarmament of the mind, which is the only real disarmament. Differences in religious beliefs and political opinion do make impossible co-operation in matter of common interests.

All religions proclaim the brotherhood of man. Let these religions unite to secure the abolition of discriminating laws under which numerous racial and ethnic groups are denied even elementary justice. Let them unite to combat all forms of national chauvinism and resist all attempts at spreading the growth of militarism and war-mongering. Let them unite to secure that every nation, great or small, in any part of the world, whatever its race, shall have the right to choose freely its

own way of life, and to see that it in its turn respect the way of life chosen freely by other people.

Let the leaders of the various religions stretch out their hands to people of other creeds with a genuine feeling of brotherhood. Let them, in order to do this, abandon their attitude of arrogance and their claim to having a monopoly of all truth and wisdom, and of being entitled to judge the followers of other faiths. Let them also agree to stop competing for converts in the market places by using questionable methods of propagation by exploiting poverty and ignorance and helplessness and more especially the conversion – or rather the subversion – of children in schools and orphanages.

The task of internal government and the resolution of the internal conflict will be rendered very much easier and governmental interference in the lives of people made comparatively unnecessary, if men and women throughout the world can be made to realise the value of devotion to and practice of the ideals of truth, justice, service, charity and love, so universally proclaimed by religion. We hope that sincere respect for other man's religion will prevail everywhere and be held in high honour.

Emperor Asoka who sent Buddhist Missionaries to many parts of the world to introduce the peace message of the Buddha had announced the following message:-

“One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religion of others, but one should honour other's religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking, “I will glorify my own religion”. But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely, so concord is good: “Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others”.

Therefore, in order that religion should be accepted as the most potent force for the good in this world every endeavour should be made to promote the growth of the religious spirit, religious harmony and understanding for the welfare of mankind.

Why have most religions failed in making any solid contribution towards peace? So many reasons have been advanced. The chief reason has been that most religions have based their ideas of brotherhood – the brotherhood of the followers of this or that religion – on one make-belief or the other.

This emphasis on considering a certain man or a woman as your brother or sister simply because he or she believes as you do, has on one side divided the society into so many different beliefs – organizations called religions; and on the other, has taught every individual belonging to a particular religion not only to think of his co-religionists as brothers, but also to think of outsiders not only as strangers or aliens but even sometimes enemies. How can there be any peace here in this world, when most of our attempts are in such a wrong direction?

The Buddha changed the emphasis from belief to behaviour. What you believe may be a matter for your personal and individual consideration, but the whole society is directly and vitally concerned with your behaviour and conduct.

If we could just think of the whole society of the whole humanity as one single organization, different individuals free to believe as they like, but when it comes to social behaviour everybody behaving in a way that he would desire others behave towards him, perhaps we could take a step towards real Peace.

After all, all humanity is of one blood.

MORALITY AND RELIGION

Though the world is a world of law, the supreme law of the world is not physical but moral. The real worth of human beings consists not in wealth and power but in their inner moral quality; it is this moral quality which governs their destiny. This truth is common to all the great religions.

Morality is a purely human virtue yet, one has a sense of social justice, of social responsibility, and speaks of the solidarity of human beings. Morals, then, as you could see, do not lose their importance with the departure of God. On the contrary, they are involved with greater passion to occupy the vacant throne of the universe. When God has been disposed, ethics is crowned in his stead.

Lao Tse, the Chinese sage said: “When the Way of natural harmony is lost, then arises virtue; after virtue is lost, then arises justice; after justice is lost, then arises ritualism.” By this he meant that when people lose their natural love of the moral order they consciously abstain from vice, and call it virtue; when this self-conscious virtue is lost they formulate a code of justice, and when this also fails, they turn to ritualism, and so on in descending order.

Moral values are the products of will and intelligence, which enable us to submit ourselves to discipline. Of course, man is fiercely inclined to satisfy his appetites, but he would be a slave if he yields to such passions. He becomes free only when his mind, and not his animal instincts, dominates his course.

By following certain rules blindly, whether they are religious or social, instead of cultivating knowledge, one makes oneself a slave to such rules instead of being free.

GOOD AND BAD

The study of behaviour shows that codes of conduct and ideas of right and wrong are not built-in features of man's nature; they have to be learned. And what is so learned is not any universal system of morality, but only the ideas prevailing in one particular place at some given period. So we find that actions which are condemned in one place are blessed with the full approval of society in others, and that at different times totally different standards prevail. Where then is there any innate, infallible guide as to what is right and what is wrong? Where is the standard by which these values are to be measured? All we can say, from observation, is that some people have a more highly developed moral sense than others, and that sometimes this shows itself at quite an early age. Where it exists it seems to be independent of heredity and, to surprising degree, of environment as well. That is a fact which many people cannot explain, but Buddhism accounts for it by past Kamma. Yet still it is the outcome of prior conditioning; the ethics and ideals have not come to birth spontaneously, but as the result of learning in previous lives. To that extent Buddhism agree with the psychology of behaviourism, it maintains that all codes of conduct have to be learned; but by showing causes that are more remote than any operating in a single life, it is able to explain those anomalies which leave the findings of the behaviourists open to question. The sense of right and wrong is not inherent, and it is not of supernatural origin; it has to be acquired; but it is not always acquired in the present life alone. It is carried over from one life to another, and that is one of the processes which make man's evolution possible. But what we have to remember is that people, besides being differently conditioned as to their ideas of right and wrong by the environment in which their minds develop, are also influenced by the ideas, appearing as instincts, some of which may be true whilst others are false, that they have "inherited" from their past existences. So there can never be any certainty that what a man's "inner voice" tells him is right, is really so. It may be most terribly and disastrously wrong. That is why Buddhism holds that intuitive feelings of right and wrong are not a safe guide.

The Buddha expressly said that sickness increases when people live without regard for the moral law. There is a definite connection between disease and the moral standards of the people in general. In a very real sense, disease is the outward and visible sign of an inward corruption. It does not mean that all sick people are wrong-doers in this present life, but that the prevalence of sickness in a society is an index of declining moral standards which affect every member in some degree. Does that seem improbable to you?

Morality is the backbone of religion. Morality is the backbone of humanity, for to lead a moral life is to lead a natural life. Morality is the law of nature.

The conception of virtue or the belief in good action is a belief common to many religions. In most religions virtue is encouraged on the basis that the performance of a good act leads to the attainment of happiness and to the procurement of final Deliverance.

The machinery by which this result is obtained is, in some cases, the invisible hand of God. And it is God who is supposed to investigate the commission of good and bad acts and later proceeds to perform the functions of a Supreme Court Judge, and metes out the necessary rewards and punishments. In other cases the machinery takes the form of the natural inexorable and automatic Law of Karma. The Law of Karma like the Law of Gravitation is a natural law of the Universe, but it is difficult to be apprehended in all its comprehensiveness. In religious systems where the Karmic Law operates there is no collegiate atmosphere of a stern school master ladling out prizes for good behaviour and caning for bad.

To a Buddhist the practice of virtue is necessary because it is part of the technique of skilful living, of the art and science, of the noble life; and without this pattern of ethical discipline there cannot be a cleansing of the defilements of sentient existence.

The Buddhist conception of virtue is based upon the Buddhist conception of life which has been crystallized for all times in the memorable phrase, "Anicca Dukkha, Anatta." Life is nothing more than recurring rotation of birth and death. Like the flame of a candle it changes every moment although it maintains an unchanging appearance. In consequence of the rapid succession of events man is deceived into the belief that the individual is a permanent entity; even as a stick whirled round very rapidly produces the appearance of a complete circle.

This criterion is further exemplified by the admonition given by the Buddha to young Rahula. "Any thought, word or deed that leads to the happiness of yourself or to the happiness of others is Kusala or meritorious. Any thought, word or deed that leads to the suffering of yourself and or those of others is Akusala or demeritorious."

The tree of civilization has its roots in spiritual values, which most of us do not recognize. Without these roots the leaves would fall and the tree would be a lifeless stump.

We realize that by observing religious precepts we can at least reduce the suffering we cause others, hence precepts are taken as a set of rules for right living. A true religion means faith in GOOD rather than faith in GOD. Faith in

God is only a belief which is not accepted by every thinking man; but there is no argument regarding the faith in GOOD.

As long as we ignore the true nature of ourselves, it is impossible to know one's ultimate goal of life. Ignorance of one's goal is like a captain's ignorance of the destination of his ship. Finding himself in an unknown spot in mid-ocean: he will have no other choice but to follow the whims of the winds and currents. There is no likelihood that he could take a firm course under such circumstances. Worse it is when the captain is misinformed of his ship's destination, and guides it deliberately into a wrong port or even into destruction.

The social, moral, ethical and economical conception of life are centered in religion. The blood of life is love, and virtue is its backbone. Without virtue life cannot stand and without love life is dead. The development of life depends upon the development of virtue and the outflow of love, rising when virtue rises and expanding with it. Since man is not perfect by nature, he has to train himself to be good. Thus morality becomes for him the most important aspect in life. "When wealth is gone, nothing is gone, when health is gone, something is gone, when character is gone everything is gone." Vice is easily acquired without a master, whereas virtue requires a tutor. There is a good need for the teaching of virtue by precepts and examples through a religion.

Knowledge without religious background is dangerous; it is like an undisciplined strong man with a lethal weapon in his hand, for he could destroy many lives with it very easily. Knowledge together with virtue is likened to a well disciplined man with a weapon which he could use wisely. He can save lives with it.

"Without virtue man is merely the most dangerous animal."

Purity of mind must be the greatest common denominator of a religion. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn."

Buddhist precepts or morality are nothing but a general guidance to show the direction in which the Buddhists ought to turn on his way to salvation. Mere knowledge of the doctrine of a religion does not serve a man to obtain his salvation. He must observe the religious principles to strengthen his moral background. Otherwise he is like a thirsty man who finds a deep well but without a rope or a bucket to draw water from it, and he in consequence is obliged to endure his suffering, and experience in his person nothing but mere knowledge that there is water.

Buddhist culture is nothing but a continual struggle against the monstrous evil. How deeply the evil has taken root in the human heart, how hard it is to uproot it, but still how important it is to do so. Deep down in our hearts there is a feeling that people who are moral because God had established certain codes of conduct as moral (and flanked such codes with promises of happiness or with

threats of punishment) are only superficially moral. We despise them as we would despise people who obey the civil law of a country merely because they are afraid of its penalties. If moral action is not spontaneous and free from hope, or reward, or the fear of retribution, we despise it. Therefore we should not introduce religion only by depicting a hell fire or a heavenly bliss. We should not narrow the vast field of religious education by introducing only these two things, as this kind of religious instruction would appeal only to children. The world needs the ethics of religion as a sick man needs a physician in its law of cause and effect.

In place of ceremony and sacrifice morality and wisdom were introduced by the Buddha. The distinction between good and evil and their reactions, people come to know through a religion. When you read Buddhist ethics you can understand how far this moral system, designed twenty-five centuries ago, can appeal to the modern society. Self-restraint, temperance, liberality, reverence, gratitude, veracity, righteousness, gentleness, obedience, charity, love, sympathy, forgiveness, tolerance and justice were introduced to the world as great virtues by religions.

People may cheat the government but not religion. One who tries to cheat religion cheats oneself. Discipline cannot be brought out by coercion and compulsion nor by science, but by sincerely following a religion which stands for peace, purity and happiness.

Human beings as animals are naturally endowed with strong passions or instincts, and naturally crave to indulge in them. If therefore, they are not restrained by means of religious or moral culture, that is to say, if they are left to run their natural course without being restrained in any way, the result will be moral degeneration of individuals and destruction of social order. They must, therefore, be controlled and led aright through the power of reason given by a religion. Your wealth can decorate only your house but not you. Religion is a garment for man's moral nakedness.

Human beings, like animals, are naturally prone to seek satisfaction of their instincts. Among these are appetite and procreative desire, which are essential for their own existence. The satisfaction of these desires in the case of human beings does not at all mean moral degeneration, provided we give vent to them in the proper way, and in a moderate degree. But if the desires are satisfied in a wrong way or to an excessive degree, it will be physically, psychologically, and none the less morally injurious. As the moth is attracted to fire by its natural impulses only to be burnt to death at once, so human beings when too eager to satisfy these instincts are unconscious of the serious results which their satisfaction may bring upon them. The lack of reason and weakness of will, which results from want of self-control, often lead people to these lamentable results. What religious and moral teaching has to do, therefore, is to train people to satisfy these desires in a proper manner or in a moderate and reasonable

degree, or to cultivate a power within us which enables us to resist abnormal excitement of these impulses.

Human beings, as animals on the one hand, always seek to satisfy their natural desires, but on the other though it may sound rather paradoxical, they aspire to purify or ennoble themselves, thereby always aiming at a high and noble life. This is a privilege which human beings alone enjoy.

The people of highly cultured society evidently have these opposite or seemingly opposite natures. They are, so far as their natural instincts are concerned, the same as animals or primitive men; and accidental chances may turn civilized men into mere animals or primitive men in an instant. We often hear of 'a moment of weakness'. In this respect the high civilization of society or the high principle of individual is not a perfect safeguard against evil resulting from the incitement of passion. But, on the other hand, the moral, intellectual, aesthetical cultures which have been carried on from generation to generation have elevated them far above that of mere animals or primitive men. The more cultured a society is, morally and otherwise, the more advanced it is understood to be. It is the same with an individual. The richer a society or an individual is in intellectual, moral or aesthetical pleasure, or in spiritual pleasure, the less materialistic it is; in other words the more animal pleasure is purified or ennobled, the more civilized the society or individual is. Without religious morality civilization could never progress.

As William Hawes says: "A good character is, in all cases, the fruit of personal exertion. It is not inherited from parents. It is not created by external advantages, it is no necessary appendage of birth, wealth, talents or station: but it is the result of one's own endeavours."

After all, a scientist or a man in the street, if he has not understood the importance of conduct, the urgency of wholesome endeavour, the necessity to apply knowledge to life, is, so far as the doctrine of the Buddha is concerned, an immature person, who has yet to negotiate many more hurdles before he wins the race of life and the immortal prize of Nibbana, the Deathless.

SUPERIORITY OF MAN

Among all living beings man stands out as a unique being. While his features, functions, and behaviour are classified as those of the animal world, as a human being he stands apart from all other animals. True, in the evolutionary classification, he is counted as belonging to the animal world. It is also true that very often human beings behave like animals. Nevertheless, man is more than an animal; he is a human being, that is he is kind, tender, merciful and intelligent. It is in the human being that self-consciousness operates at a high degree, and it is he, of all animals, that is endowed with the sense of right and wrong, good and

evil, and with the power of judging them and choosing the right and the good, and rejecting the wrong and the evil. This sense of choosing the right and the good, and acting up to it, is to be seen only in man; and that is the sense of Dharma, righteousness, which is to be highly spoken of in all the great religions of the world.

It is on the basis of this Dharma or righteousness that religion as well as moral life is built, and even social life becomes ennobling when its value is recognized and applied in individual as well as collective life. It is religion that holds society together. Without it, no society can live and function even for a day. It is because man has this sense of Dharma that all progress is possible for him, social as well as spiritual. And it is this special quality in him that distinguishes man from all the other animals. There is a well-known Sanskrit verse in the Mahabharata which says: "In matter of food, sleep, and other physical needs, man is on par with the animals. It is the sense of Dharma, righteous living with all its implications, that differentiates him from the animals. It is Dharma that makes a man human; without it, he is merely an animal or worse than an animal."

Such a rare privilege as human birth should not, therefore, be wasted; it should be put to the best service, and the highest that it is capable of should be accomplished with a sense of urgency. It would be a thousand pities if man were to forget the real purpose of his birth and run after mundane pleasures. Shankaracharya significantly remarks "What greater fool is there than the man who, having obtained a rare human body, neglects to achieve the real end (liberation) of this life"? The Buddha says: "Difficult is it to be born as a human being".

Man should become perfect and he should manifest the nobility within. That is the purpose of all religious endeavour, the aim of all spiritual practice.

NATURE OF MAN

Physical pleasures and material happiness are fugitive. They come and go, bringing joy and sorrow alternately. When joy comes man becomes elated, and when sorrow comes he becomes dejected. All the hopes and joys of this world are evanescent. They do not give perpetual peace or happiness to man. Mutability is the characteristic of this world. The whole of creation is undergoing constant and continuous change. Everything in it is subject to birth, growth, development, decay, dissolution and death. There is nothing in creation that can escape this series of transmutations.

To seek the real, which is self-revealing and immortal, man is required to turn his back on the unreal objects of this world. When he realizes the futility of running after the world and its objects, he turns his back on them. He resorts to renunciation, he withdraws himself from them and turns his search inwards. His journey ends when he reaches the 'Truth of truth' and 'Light of light'.

This turning point marks the beginning of genuine spiritual endeavour. Everything other than this is like a child's play in the name of religion. Playthings are necessary for the child, for its growth at a particular stage; but they are no longer required when that stage is past.

Religious life is an adventure. It demands a heroic spirit where occasion for doubt exists, it is right and proper to doubt on the part of man. The weakling or the feeble-minded cannot tread the spiritual path. "The self cannot be realized by the weak", says the Upanishad. Religion offers the greatest challenge to man. It challenges him to give up, too much of attachment that he holds near and dear to himself, no sacrifice is too great for success. No other consideration should hold man back. All the religions warn man against the dangers and pitfalls that he has to encounter in his spiritual pilgrimage. They prescribe methods by which he can avoid the pitfalls and overcome the difficulties and dangers on the way. There are several methods to suit the mental equipment and spiritual competence of diverse aspirants.

Today you may be a millionaire, tomorrow you can be a pauper. Today you are very healthy and beautiful, tomorrow the beauty and youth can vanish. Similarly you can end poverty and ill health by your Karma (deeds). This advice is a real magic that can cure all our depressed moods. It is a great tonic for weak hearts.

Man seeks wealth to satisfy his urge for pleasure. Desire seeks satisfaction; wealth help him to get this satisfaction. If unchecked by ethical and spiritual values and disciplines, this urge for pleasure in him becomes an endless urge; every satisfaction raises ten more urges for pleasure. Desires chase satisfactions and satisfaction chases desires, leaving man a prey to unethical proclivities. The ideal of a complete man, integral and fulfilled, recedes far into the background.

But he becomes distressed to find that his heart is still craving for pleasures; the body had become old and unfit as an instrument of pleasure, but the heart remains youthful in its urge for pleasure. This glaring fact makes him thoughtful; and, reviewing his life with its double round of pleasures, he is struck with the foolishness of it all and tries to extricate himself from the wrong course.

Spiritual progress is possible only where there is freedom of thought. Where, however, blind belief in authority prevails then there will be no mental progress. Freedom of thinking leads to mental vigour and progress, while dogmatism leads to stagnation. Experience further shows that dogmatic belief everywhere goes hand in hand with intolerance. Wherever the one appears the other is not far off.

The spiritual development of man is more important than the attainment of his material comforts. History has taught us that we cannot expect human comforts and happiness at the same time. The lives of people are in the main regulated

by spiritual values and moral principles which only religion can effectively provide.

Man is the most significant of all beings, according to Buddhism; man is of more significance than the gods. Why is this? It is because the gods are merely enjoying temporarily the results of good actions performed in the past, but man contains within himself additional potentialities. He is the master of his own destiny; on the battlefield of his own mind he can conquer the ten thousand world-systems and put an end to Samsara, just as did the Buddha. But in order to do this he must understand the nature of Kamma, the principle that governs his internal and external world.

REAL RELIGIOUS MAN

Religion must be practiced for the happiness and welfare of all living beings. This is one of the fundamental principles introduced by a religion. A person who always goes to a temple, church, mosque or any other place of worship and prays, only for his own benefit without following religious advices and paying no regard for others, cannot be regarded as a religious man. This is because he performs such prayers and practices with a selfish motive. There may be some people who have never attended religious ceremonies, sacrifices or prayers in places of worship, but nevertheless follow some religious principles by living a peaceful life, by trying to overcome their own weakness, and having sympathy, tolerance and understanding towards others. Such people may be considered more religious than the others.

The man who has thoroughly purified his own self with good thoughts, good words, and good deeds is the perfect and religious man from the Buddhist point of view.

An ideal for any religious man is a simple life through which he may be saved from being encumbered by any external material objectives, and may devote his whole energy to his spiritual cultivation for the benefit of himself and others.

Man can earn his living without a religion, but that living would not be a right one unless he adjusts his living into a righteous way as taught by religion. The need of man for spiritual food is greater than his need for physical food, as there will be so many problems regarding life which he cannot solve to his satisfaction without guidance given by a religion.

Religious life is a series of perpetual struggles in abstaining from evils whether mental or physical on the one hand and in pursuing what is considered to be good or holy on the other; and the necessity of maintaining patience and endurance in either case goes without saying. In other words, in the subordination of lower impulses to higher, which in one sense forms the aim and

process of moral or religious culture, endurance and perseverance are of the utmost importance. Thus a religious man must endure and persevere to maintain the religious standard of living befitting himself and his associates.

RELIGION AND CHILDREN

Whether religion should be taught to children or not is indeed a controversial subject. Those who argue on this point say that religion is a very deep subject and that children do not have the mental capacity to grasp the high ideology or religious teachings and hence should not be taught to them. If we were to teach one particular religion during such a tender age they would become lopsided and hinder the progress of their mental faculties and would be an extra burden to them. They say, therefore, it is advisable to teach a religion to persons after they have attained the age of reason. On the other hand we have to weigh the different attitudes of people, and ascertain how far they have fulfilled their social obligations and duties towards their country, their nation and their families amongst whom there were those who have had religious instruction and those who have not had such training. The behaviour of young people with and without a religious background is entirely different. The man with a religious education always looks at others with sympathetic feeling which was implanted in his heart whilst one without a religion is inclined to be more artificial in outlook, giving forced sympathy or kindness for outward show only. Such artificial feelings do not last and the real colour would soon be exposed. The animal nature of man can be easily seen in him at any moment if he has had no religious education. Religion is the only weapon which could suppress the animal instincts of man. Whilst so giving instruction, religious instructors must be very careful not to create any sense of hatred towards other religions by unduly condemning or criticizing such religions. If such an attitude of hate is ingrained amongst the young people, miseries, calamities, sufferings, misunderstandings, atrocities and bloodshed would be brought about in this world.

It has to be remembered that religious fanatics are ever ready to adopt any unscrupulous methods in the name of their religion although they themselves do not observe religious principles. Therefore religions should be handled very carefully since it is a very delicate and emotional subject.

How many parents are worrying themselves today because of their disobedient children who violate the peace and happiness of their families, their society and their country. It has become a major problem to every government throughout the world to suppress juvenile delinquency.

If we were to make a thorough investigation on this issue, we would be able to find out that many of these youngsters have had no religious education when they were young, no religious atmosphere in their homes and no religious background in their normal day to day work. Therefore, a proper religious

education is the most essential requisite of life. But most unfortunately many parents are interested only in giving an academical knowledge to their children to enable them to get a better job so as to make more money. They have not yet realized the value of a sound religious education to train their children to become good citizens of the country, to lead a happy and peaceful family life and to have a peaceful atmosphere at home. If they have taken this matter seriously there won't be a day for them to shed tears on account of their children going astray. Fathers develop heart troubles, mothers suffer sleepless nights by thinking and worrying themselves about the behaviour of their wayward children. Therefore it is the duty of every parent to show the real path to their children by bringing them up under a religious atmosphere. Such a religious atmosphere is easily attainable by the learning and practical application of simple and yet dignified teachings available in the main religions.

We need to learn religion right from our infancy in our homes. When children are taught to respect their parents, love their neighbours, tell the truth, be unharmed and not take what does not belong to them, they are learning the essentials of religion. When children are admitted to schools, religious teachings should be continued without a break. A child brought up in this manner will have his religion well-established and when eventually he has to leave school, he will walk out into the world with religion in him as a shield to protect him in the battle of life.

HOW TO CHOOSE A RELIGION

The ultimate aim of every religion is to show the path towards peace, happiness and salvation. But the founders of each of these religions and their followers have adopted different methods to reach that goal. It is up to man therefore to choose according to his intellectual standard the religion that appeals to him as the most rational, logical and practicable. There are various similarities as well as dissimilarities amongst religions, not only doctrinally and philosophically but also ethically. These differences are unavoidable because every religion was brought about according to the environment, atmosphere, surroundings and temperament of their originating country and its people. But sorrow, happiness, pain, pleasure and feelings are common to all humanity.

Today we want a religion – not one that had descended from heaven – but a religion which was introduced through the experience of human nature, human feeling and human intelligence.

Religions such as those which were introduced to the world by requiring their followers to depend on some external source for salvation (due to misguidance or ignorance of the nature of this universe) can no longer appeal to the modern intellectual mind. Religions which promise happiness only after one's death is also not a satisfactory answer to many.

Man can find his peace and happiness not by praying to a God or by offering or sacrificing something to please such a God but self-training, self-restraint, self-discipline, self-purification and finally by giving up the very idea of “self” itself. These are the teachings of Buddhism.

There is no dispute as to whether man should have a religion or not, but if he is to follow a religion then it must be one which can satisfactorily answer the problems of life.

Man is a thinker, and can never be content with mere animal comfort. Hearing the voice of religion he has come to recognize the fact that his mental world is governed by law just as much and truly as his physical world is, and so he makes serious efforts to uncover and use this mental law. He has thus found to his delight that the proper use of physical law has increased his mental and spiritual comfort and well being.

The Buddhist religion teaches us that all of man’s unhappiness comes from his wanting the wrong sort of things, such as pleasures that money can buy, power over other men, and, most important of all, the inherent desire to go on “living for ever” even after one is dead. The desire for these things makes people selfish, so much so that they come to think only of themselves, to want things only for themselves, and do not for a moment mind as to what happens to other people. And since invariably they do not get all what they wish for, they become restless and discontented. The only way to avoid this restlessness is to get rid of the desires that actually cause them. This is very difficult; but when a man achieves it, he reaches a state of mind which is called **NIRVANA** – end of sufferings.

In choosing a religion we can apply the advice the Buddha gave to the Kalamas 2500 years ago when he said: “In cases where occasion for doubt exists, it is right and proper to doubt. Do not go upon mere report, or tradition or hearsay; neither go upon correspondence with holy writings, upon (unsupported) cogitation or specious reasoning; nor should you go upon the approval of accepted notions, nor upon the authority of one who may appear competent, nor be guided by the instinct of reverence, thinking “This ascetic is our teacher.” But, Kalamas, when you yourselves know (by observation, experience and right judgment): ‘Such things are bad, such things are blameable; such things are censured by the wise; such things when undertaken and followed lead to harm and ill’ – then you should abandon such things. But when you yourselves know: ‘Such things are good, such things are praiseworthy; such things are commended by the wise, such things when undertaken and followed lead to the good and welfare of all beings’ then you should keep such things.”

Religion is something to be approached by individual reasoning, mature consideration and sober reflection but not by emotional feeling nor under threat and fear.

The basic distinction between what is good and what is bad is very simple in Buddhism. All actions that have their roots in greed, hatred and delusion, that spring from selfishness and so foster the harmful delusion of selfhood, are demeritorious and bad. All those which are rooted in disinterestedness, friendliness and wisdom are meritorious and good, and this standard applies, irrespective of whether the deeds are of thought, word or deed.

Certain religious teachings prepare the minds of young men to cling to dogmas which appeal only to their superficial intellects. A mind, trained to appreciate barren intellectual dogmas and cling to them, would become a desert in which the seeds of confidence or the idea of holy would not grow.

RELIGION AND MATERIALISM

Materialists maintain that there is no moral resultant of thoughts or actions nor any past or future state of man as a thinking, self-determining entity; man comes into existence merely as the result of material causes, and passes away again into annihilation just like any other material object. Religion, according to them, was invented solely to reconcile the depressed classes to their fate by giving them the delusive hope of a better life beyond the grave. A historical study of the development of religion in all its forms and phases from prehistoric times, however, shows the unscientific nature of this hypothesis; but the theory, as it is at present held by them, does no longer deserve to be considered scientific; it has become a political dogma, precisely on par with the Nazi pseudo-scientific theory of racial superiority.

Materialism, then directs all its attention to the present sphere of existence; man's hope and all his being cannot extend any further beyond the brief spell of his physical existence on this planet. Any system of religion or philosophy therefore must be false if it asserts the importance of moral values or gives promise of a spiritual evolution or a spiritual happiness for living beings. This creed of Nihilism, is one of the systems of false theorizing exposed and refuted by the Buddha where the Teacher dealt with the philosophies current in India of His day. Essentially, Dialectical Materialism has nothing new to offer. It stands for a retrogression in human thought and it is this fact that must be known and taken into account in choosing between the Buddhist way of life and that sponsored by materialists.

Today, however, there are strong anti-religious ideas prevalent in the world which constitute a threat to the spiritual life. The world is in the grip of materialistic ideologies based upon the natural laws and principles revealed by science, and there is no religion scientific or rationalistic enough to combat these ideas, except Buddhism. It is vitally important that we should find out how Buddhism stands in relation to the scientific beliefs of the present day, because there is every indication that Western materialism is invading Asia, hitherto the stronghold of

spiritual life, and that it is doing so to the detriment of Buddhist civilization and culture. The strength of materialism, with its great appeal to the modern rationalistic outlook formed by the technical and mechanical advances of civilization, is a direct result of scientific progress. People all over the world have come to regard civilization as being the same things as material progress, and they measure the advance of civilization by the amount of purely material benefit it can show. The present trend of world events reveals this view to be a fallacy, but there are few people farsighted enough to acknowledge the fact, and because of the prevalence of this quite erroneous idea there is now a great conflict between the religious mode of thought represented by the great moral and spiritual creeds of former days, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, and the modern skeptical disbelief in everything of higher spiritual nature, which goes by the name of "materialism". That conflict is growing day by day, and it has come to assume a political as well as an intellectual aspect, since materialism is now powerfully represented as a political ideology, which sets up Dialectical Materialism as its "religion" and is striving to abolish all other forms of belief from the world.

The Chief reason why materialism has grown to be so powerful an influence in the modern world is because, as we shall see, science has proved so many of the doctrines of religion to be unacceptable, so that nowadays there are very few educated and intelligent people who can wholeheartedly subscribe to them. Those who do still hold to their faith, have been forced by the advance of knowledge to alter and modify their ideas a great deal from the original doctrines taught by their religion. Some religions, to give the most striking example from the scientifically-progressive West, have had to admit that many of their beliefs were wrong. They have had, within the last century or so, to retract from their position with respect to many of their principal dogmas. Yet some of these beliefs were at one time held to be so essential as articles of faith that people were excommunicated for refusing to believe them. From the nature of some of these primitive beliefs of these religions it is clear that the founders of some religion were not endowed with any deeper insight into the real laws of the universe than the most ignorant of their contemporaries, and that therefore their claim to be directly inspired by God is not supported by any evidence whatever.

Apart from the theoretical aspect of the question there is also the all-important political side. Materialism, is at war with religion partly because in the past certain forms of State religions have been used as instruments for terrorizing the people with threats to eternal damnation in order to keep them in submission to authority. At the same time it has, under such regimes, been employed as a means of keeping the depressed and ignorant peasantry contented with their unfortunate position in this world by promising them happiness in heaven. But this has never been universally true by any means, for in many countries religion has gone side by side with social progress, even where it has been in conflict with science.

There is no reason to believe that either of them had studied Buddhism or any other Oriental religion, or that they took any interest in Asiatic social problems. They were essentially European revolutionaries with a Western materialistic outlook, and with no interest in, or sympathy for, the needs of Asian people. Their successors, who have made their anti-religious slogan into a kind of religious dogma, now use it to attack all religions indiscriminately.

So far, we must admit that the first round in the fight between materialism and Western religious ideas goes to materialism; and the evidence of a concrete scientific nature appears to be on the side of the materialist. Religion can call nothing to its aid but a body of traditional belief of legends and primitive lore backed up by wild and conflicting doctrines taught by rival mystical systems each of which maintains that its own view is correct and all the others false. The modern educated man pays no attention to these claims; to him they are mere fairy tale relics of a past age belonging to the infancy of human thought. All the benefits that have come to humanity, he points out, have come from materialistic science, the work of human hands and brains, not the gift by any god. It is man himself who has raised his status from savagery to civilization; it is man who has harnessed the laws of nature for his benefit, and similarly it is he who has introduced the concepts of mercy, charity and justice into the world by a slow and painful process of development, not by any divine inspiration. It cannot be long before every obsolete religious idea is swept away before the advance of knowledge, and rationalism will come to take the place of blind faith.

This kind of thing may pass as truth with simple undeveloped minds but it will not do for those who test everything by the highest standards of reason. To present it for the serious consideration of a modern educated man is an affront to his intelligence.

This is a viewpoint that simply cannot be ignored; it is strong, too firmly grounded in factual knowledge and experience to be brushed aside. Unless religion can answer it, there is no hope for the survival of spiritual values.

The supernatural foundation of religion is no longer capable of supporting ethical systems in the modern world. Buddhism is the religion that supplies the rationalistic element that the twentieth century demands for any belief in spiritual values.

It has been found that progress in the material sense is not necessarily accompanied by growth of wisdom or deeper understanding of spiritual values. Mankind now has command of tremendous material forces, but does not know how to use this power for beneficial ends. Instead, the tendency of man is still to employ whatever knowledge he has gained in the oppression and destruction of his fellows. The madness of greeds for possessions and for power, points a finger not towards perfection but towards self-destruction, and the gifts of science are only being used to hasten humanity on the fatal road. As H.G. Wells, once

firm believer in evolution through knowledge, pointed out shortly before his death as a disillusioned man, the human being is like a clever monkey, possessing dangerous toys, which it does not know how to handle safely, or how to put to a good and constructive purpose. Man's spiritual growth has not kept pace with his increased command of technical knowledge and he is like a lunatic loose in a power-house.

Freedom of selection between right and wrong, between ignorance and knowledge, implies the highest degree of personal responsibility. Under the influence of materialism humanity is rapidly losing sight of spiritual values and is choosing the path of darkness and ignorance. What is needed today is a return to the Wisdom of the past, which is also the highest wisdom of the future – the wisdom that belongs to all ages and all the races of mankind. Without that there can be no lasting peace or certainty of progress for individuals or nations.

SCIENCE WITHOUT RELIGION

Some scholars are so simple-minded as to say that as we are in a scientific age today, human thought should proceed actively along the open highway of science, and religion is of no use to us anymore. So in their mind they look down upon those students and advocates of religion as backward elements and obstacle to human progress. This way of thinking is the most shallow of its kind. Everyone of some vision knows that in the history of humanity over the last two hundred years, the advancement of science has brought forth modern civilization. Hereafter, too man will continue his progress along various branches of science to seek advancement in human knowledge and abilities in order to improve living. However, is it right that academic studies should be directed to the scientific side alone without going in the other directions? This question needs to be carefully and profoundly considered.

Can the achievement of those who always talk about science be devoid of any idea of religion surpassing everything in this world? As we see it, the existence of religion in human society is a historical fact. If religion is not needed by man, it would have been eliminated long ago without the trouble of man having to thumb it down now. But religious believers are found in every corner of the earth. Even totalitarian states like USSR and Communist China have no way to suppress the freedom of religion. In the statistics of world publications, religious and literary writings take the highest percentage every year.

The life span of any man can hardly be over one hundred years, but this spiritual or mental demand is unlimited. The definition of religion is man's thought and belief towards the questions of life and death, and the relation between nature and mankind. In the application of science for seeking truth by mankind, it is necessary on one hand for many to work along fields of study to ferret out the minutest problems within the universe by sharp thinking and scrutinizing analysis

and on the other hand, to have many to use their all-comprehensive thinking to seek the meaning of human living in this world as a whole. Those who are engaged in these two different lines of work should render mutual help, show mutual love and respect and bear mutual witness with open heart to seek the highest, greatest, best and sublime truth, so that the results of these two kinds of studies will develop in balance and work in perfect co-operation with the purpose of realizing an Utopia for mankind.

Thus science and religion, even philosophy and literature are needed by mankind. If man cannot accept this very common sense and, if an individual biased in his opinion and with a deflected individuality, insists on crushing down anybody whose opinion is different from his to create troubles and continuous strife, it is the mischievous working of the primitive urge hidden in human nature which is also the cause of incessant tragedies that happen in human relations. This has nothing to do with science.

“Everything in Britain and America has changed for the better – except man,” says John Walters in his book ‘Mind Unshaken’. Everything looks happier; yet man himself is no happier. Today more and more people worry themselves into insanity. Psychiatry has become a big business because of the fears of men and women that they are going mad. Thousands of neurotics of the West are haunted by a sense of inferiority and insecurity. Yet this is no illusion. It is exactly what has happened. They feel inferior and insecure because they have no convincing religion or philosophy on which to base their lives with confidence. They are spiritually penniless in the midst of material plenty. It may be suggested that Buddhism may be given a trial there.

For a time, it was thought that science could fill the gap left by religion. But humanity has been disillusioned, science has brought no comfort nor solace to that sense of incompleteness which is the essence of our being. Although science may make us more comfortable, it certainly cannot make us more happy. Science performs many miracles, but they are confined to man’s environment alone. Science does not change man. In many respects, despite the advantages conferred by scientific progress, science has only heightened rather than lessened man’s feeling of dependence and insufficiency, whilst tending to destroy that spiritual support which previously upheld him.

Applied science, though it has eased human labour to a great extent, has shown a strong tendency to enslave, rather than liberate, the human element. Medical science, despite the blessing it has bestowed upon mankind, has done but little to comfort us other than that of increasing, by an insignificant period, our short stay upon this planet. Psychology, despite its consolation to the introvert, offers no dynamic means to comfort and inspire man. The pursuit of pleasure offers no permanent satisfaction, for pleasure so indulged in becomes a necessity and by definite degrees becomes less pleasurable.

The menace of new warfare has shown that, by following the path of purely material progress, man has unleashed forces which will ultimately bring his own annihilation. Only a moral revolution, which can be effected by religion and religion alone can save mankind.

Life for many people are empty and unsatisfying. Many realize that they are caught in a machine of their own making; they wish to free themselves, but do not know how to go about it. The cry then goes up continually: "What is this life for?"

The chief point of man's religion is how far can its philosophy be applied to his uman problems. Yet these human problems are cosmic, for man is subject himself to the cosmos. The cry of man's heart for a purpose in life is the non-recognition of this fact. When a man feels his real nature awakening to life in his human everyday self, he no longer cries for a purpose in life, for he realizes that he is himself the manifestation of that very purpose. He is impelled by a deep urge to push on to the goal of self realization. Restless and dissatisfied men seeking aimlessly for a light and purpose outside of themselves end up in ultimate unhappiness and discontentment.

In the Buddha's doctrine of Compassion we can find the solution to fear that hangs over the world today – the fear of an all-annihilating war in which all the most powerful weapons that civilization has devised for the destruction of civilization may be brought into use. International organizations like the UNO can no more remove war by means of self-help among nations than a police constable can solve the problem of crime among individuals. The world can never be free of wars until the nations learn to respect human life in such a way as to feel for the suffering of human beings wherever they may be. Such a state can only come out of universal Compassion as was taught by the Buddha.

Truth in religion is to be experienced by realization. It is not an objective truth which can be realized only by the experimental methods of science. Knowledge of science can destroy the world if it is controlled properly but science plus religion can serve the world and save us all.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE SHUN RELIGION?

Some people have often said: "Religion is the soul of soulless conditions, the heart of a heartless world, the opium of the people."

Such statements are often made by persons who are really fed up with religions. This is because for many centuries religious authorities had misused religion by keeping their followers in the dark for their personal gain and power. Mankind today is divided in the name of religion. Certain religionists condemned the followers of other religions as "heathens", "pagans" and "infidels". The founders

of a certain religion who have done a great service for the happiness and welfare of mankind were even referred to as “devils”.

To propagate the peace message of their religion, certain religionists had themselves violated the peace and polluted the good name of religion through wars and bloodshed. No one can hide these facts because all these unfortunate incidents remain recorded in world history. Thus some people feel that religion has contributed more miseries than happiness. Religion has thus become a great burden to them. They used to believe that religion blindfolded man. They did not realize that man was not made for religion; but that religion was in fact made for man. The overzealous religionists fought for power under the garb of religion. They tried to show that they were working very hard to send others to heaven, but personally they had neglected to observe their own basic religious principles.

When people were not educated and science was then not known to them, they had their own imaginations with regard to the universe and life. Those beliefs and ideas were based on misunderstanding and ignorance, nevertheless they were introduced in the name of religion and preached as the real truth. Those who had faith accepted such theories without questions and clung to them blindly.

The dawn and advancement of science revealed the real nature of the universe and life and as a result their former religious beliefs were shattered and exposed and many people wanted to withdraw from religion completely. Because of this revolution, the religious authorities had to find out new versions and interpretations to conform with the factual conditions so as to protect their religion. It appears that they have been too late. Still there are many vulnerable dark spots in their doctrine, which they cannot easily erase by specious reasoning.

Under the circumstances, we cannot blame those who hate religion because many people are educated today. They cannot agree with all those theories, dogmas, blind faith and practices introduced by the people who were ignorant of nature’s laws. Today they want something which is rational, reasonable, logical and practicable. Unless and until we give them some rational religion which they can understand and agree; the number of non-believers will increase.

FREE THINKERS

There are some people who call themselves free thinkers, and are even proud of it. This is not a very healthy state of affairs. Of course, each person is at liberty to choose his own religion according to his convictions. To do this, he must have time to study and investigate, nevertheless he should not condemn any particular religion just because he cannot understand or agree with it nor should he remain

forever a free thinker. He should find out a suitable religion for himself since there are existing rational and practicable religions in this world, accepted by great thinkers and cultured people. A man without a religion is likened to an isolated small boat in a stormy sea.

The purpose of life and salvation depends on religion. By practising a rational religion he can train himself to live as a cultured man and finally be able to achieve eternal peace and happiness. His wealth, academical knowledge, name, power and other embellishments cannot give him his peace of mind and happiness. A person without a religion will feel that something is lacking in him more particularly during the latter part of his life. Religion is the only friend which can give him satisfaction and consolation up to his last moment; but not his property, nor all his material achievement.

If all those so-called free thinkers do really think freely, every attitude of their life should also be considered in the same way. Why then do they want to represent themselves as free thinkers only when they talk about religion?

Anyway, one should not force another person to embrace any particular faith. A person must himself realize the value of a religion and try to adjust his life accordingly in order to live happily and peacefully and allow others also to live likewise.

Some people feel that if they could live as cultured people without following any religion, there is no necessity for them to embrace a religion. Such people should remember that it was religion that taught mankind to live as cultured people, it was also religion which taught mankind to live without disturbing the peace and happiness of others. There is no righteous way of life which religion has not influenced. Therefore man cannot and must not forget religion. Religion alone can turn the tide of selfish materialism towards the goal of selfless dedication towards an ideal of service to mankind. The benefits of religious instruction belong to the inner spirit of the human personality. Faith, charity, love, understanding, tolerance and fellowship survive in the climate of a religious background.

Religion and culture cannot be separated. When religious practices and beliefs penetrate the minds of the people for centuries they forget the name of the religion but practise such things as cultural habits. Religious precepts became dead rules of conduct when they do not become cultural habits of the people.

“Educate men without a religion and you make them clever devils”. “Without virtue man is merely the most dangerous animal.” “If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be without it.” A life without a religion is like a picture without colour, a poem without rhythm.”

One may say that religions have failed in preventing war. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that many religionists have failed to put into actual practice the religious principles which they are supposed to profess. At times even so-called religious leaders go to the fanatical extent of encouraging killing without the least compunction. Then try to justify war by qualifying the word as “Holy War”.

War is war whether it is for the sake of the country or nation, culture or heritage, and language or religion; war in the name of religion is the most sinister act; because religion itself teaches us not to kill!

One should not judge the merits or demerits of a religion simply by watching certain ill-conceived practices and beliefs adopted by illiterate people in the name of religion. The original teachings of the great teachers are open to everybody.

It is very hard to find a single attitude of man with which to study and to emulate in which religion has not been involved. Those who do not claim to have a religion do in fact unconsciously observe certain religious principles introduced by religion.

No religion was introduced into this world to mislead man. The founders of every religion revealed certain truths to guide man towards his destination. But the followers of those great teachers sometimes adopted various questionable methods and interpretations of their own to introduce their Masters’ Messages. It is up to the people therefore to choose their particular religion which they feel is closer to the ultimate truth.

Religion does not hinder the material progress of man if he really can understand and practise a proper religion. But religion does not encourage man to run after the mirage of illusory worldly pleasures to find his happiness.

We have seen already that much evil has been done in the name of religion, and that even today it is still possible for fanaticism of a religious or pseudo-religious kind to incite man to commit grievous crimes against humanity. There are certain political ideas current in the world which are invested with a kind of religious mystique capable of intoxicating their followers to frenzies of hatred and violence, and they are, unfortunately contagious. Cults that centre round the personality of some almost deified leaders are the modern equivalent of the religious frenzies that drove men to madness in former days. These for the most part have their origin in some supposedly inspired teachings; the leader is given the reverence due to a superman, and even if he fails miserably and comes to a degraded end there are still weak-minded and fanatical people who are ready to continue idolising him. The world would be better without “teachers” of that kind.

Some people might say that they have no time to devote to religion since they have so many other social and political commitments to meet. The following

statement would serve as an answer to such people:- “A man who puts aside his religion because he is going to join society is like unto one who takes off his shoes because he is about to embark on a journey.”

A man who involves himself deeply in various activities of everyday society to the extent of forgetting his religion is making a mistake.

One need not abandon the world to practise a religion. A philosophy of running away from the duties of life is hardly of any use to the modern world, where every man and woman has to work to earn his daily bread. We are indeed destined to work and suffer, and we ourselves are responsible for that. We must have the courage to face it and try to get rid of that sufferings without causing suffering to anybody.

Some people are scared of religions. These are generally due to the various questionable methods adopted by certain missionaries in propagating their religion. They did it in such a questionable manner and with such undue persistence as to constitute a public nuisance.

There are some protagonists who hold that since they and they alone are in possession of absolute truth and the means of salvation, they should not tolerate the views of others. Many crimes have been committed in the name of such unfounded doctrine. In reality the exaltation of intolerance is nothing but a cover for dogmatic beliefs that cannot meet the light of reasoned criticism.

Certain religions have not given a proper answer to the question “Why we suffer in this world”. And also how to solve human problems. They advise us to believe in something which we cannot digest. What we want is to choose a religion in which we can find the real answer to these problems and not a religion of just believing in blind faith. A study of Buddhism will give you the answer.

A religion is sometimes propagated under the garment of religion. Religion, many people think, belong to the Temple or the church and priests and not a subject for the home, or the laymen. Too many, religion is considered as only suitable to the old folks but not to the young, to the women folks not the men, to the poor people, not the rich people. To them religion could only be found within the covers of some musty books but not among the flowers that bloom so freshly in the fields. These ideas are the results of their negligence, laziness and misconduct of religion.

Only through religion could man cover his spiritual nakedness. The purpose of religion is to subdue and train the animal-nature of man to develop his human nature in order to attain a state of perfect being with eternal peace and happiness.

Today many people talk of religious freedom; but when we survey the world over it will be seen that real religious freedom is not practiced in most parts of the world. Real religious freedom does not only mean that people should have the freedom to practise their own religions but that they should also be given the liberty to choose any religions to follow according to their own convictions. Very unfortunately man does not have their freedom. There are various obstructions in his way and threats from every quarter. In fact he must have this freedom to choose any religion if he cannot agree with the teachings of the religion to which he already belongs. Those who cause obstruction to this attitude of religious freedom really rob the man of his free will and thereby hinder his spiritual progress.

In this age man must come to the knowledge of the Noble Path, if he comes at all, in the full light of understanding. Buddhism, as one of the great Wisdom-religion, that has endured through the ages, offers this understanding through its unusually clear and practical formulation of the Path, well described under its original name of "Truth and Discipline."

WHAT IS A DEAD RELIGION?

A dead religion is one which does not cater for the needs of our daily lives. It cannot be applied in action nor can it be assimilated. It is a religion of dogmatic statements – words, words and nothing but words. Dogmas are dried-up fossilized ideas; fixed ideas. They are no more alive than a mollusc which has been turned to stone.

Scientists tell us that in the process of evolution the animals adopted fixed ideas, fixed habits, fixed reactions. The giraffe developed a long neck; the crocodile armour and teeth. Consequently they ceased to evolve and many which could not adapt themselves to a changing environment, disappeared altogether. Thus the great dinosaurs perished when jungle became grassland. But man, because he was able to remain free of fixed ideas, had been able to adapt himself to changing conditions. Thus he has continued to develop. But those who maintain their dogmas and fixed ideas are like the animals with their fixed habits. They are unable to apply them to changing circumstances. This is why some religious people are continuously at variance with the scientist. Here Buddhism differs from all other religions. Scientists endeavour to see the world as it is, without bias or prejudice. They may not always succeed, but that is what they try to do.

About 200 years after the time of the Buddha a Greek scientist discovered that the earth was a sphere, revolving on its axis round the sun. But certain religionists had fixed ideas that the earth was flat. And by burning alive anybody who disagreed with this dogma they managed to stop the progress of knowledge. Those who accept dogmas cannot help acting like this.

But the dogma that the earth was flat never succeeded in making the earth flat. A totalitarian religion or a totalitarian state cannot change the nature of things, though they can prevent people from adapting themselves to new discoveries.

We all accept the telephone nowadays as a matter of course. Yet when the inventor, who was a Scotsman, brought his invention from America, so that Britain might be the first to benefit, he was derided and his invention rejected. Prof. Tait of Edinburgh University, when the invention was explained to him, said, "It's impossible. There can't be such an invention." Such scientists are clinging to fixed habits of thought. Therefore they dogmatise. But science has freed itself from totalitarian control, though in some countries it is not free today. Like the true scientist the Buddhist rejects dogmatic ideas and tests things for himself.

The Lord Buddha's advice to his followers in the conduct of their lives can be applied by the good modern scientist in the conduct of his scientific research.

There are two other important principles upon which the scientists nowadays agree with Buddhism. Science would be unintelligible without the acceptance of the law of cause and effect. The same may be said of Buddhism. The Buddha showed how all life and suffering depended upon causes. It is not by praying to deities that suffering is removed. By the removal of the causes and effects can be prevented. Science also recognizes that all material things are subject to change. But dogmatic religions rest on the assumption that some things including their dogmas, do not change. This is a scientific age. Religion like Buddhism can be accepted without reservation today. For there is no quarrel between Buddhists and Scientists.

Buddhism then is not a dead religion. It is scientific, modern and essentially progressive.

Therefore Buddhism can be applied to the problems of today. It is more than a religion of reciting sutras, visiting shrines and giving alms. It is a religion to be applied to daily life in the home, in daily work or business and in the affairs of the nation.

It is a religion of freedom for a democratic world.

THE RELIGION WE NEED

The unprejudiced thinker who contemplates on the problems of human conduct and personality is compelled to acknowledge that only a sane and well-thought-out way of life can give point and purposiveness to man's spiritual faculties.

It is accepted by scholars that religion could be such a way of life. It is not necessary that religion should stand for the observing of the "signs of Divine

communication” or for a binding relationship with the supernatural. A religion can just be a practical path of thought and action on right lines.

What then is the religion we need? We need just a way of life that will help us to realize our best powers, which will help us straighten our things of the inner lie, and put us in right relationship with ourselves and with others.

Taking up the last point first one sees that one could never be in harmony with others unless one sympathises with others. Sympathy implies friendship, if understanding is to be real. Thus the religion we need is a religion of friendliness, of loving-kindness, towards others.

In the matter of putting ourselves aright with ourselves we have first to get to know our own minds intimately. Most of us do not know our strength and weaknesses, our wants and what we spiritually possess. We are for the most part strangers in our own house, the mind, that house within the house of the body where we really live. And when we become familiar with the members of our mind-home we shall know that there can be no harmony or peace of mind without discipline and reunification. Viewed in this manner the religion we need is a religion of self-sacrifice and self-restraint, so far as oneself is concerned.

Re-unification and loving-kindness cannot exist without harmlessness and therefore the way of life that makes for concord with others and peace with oneself is free from all forces, violence and coercion.

It is pre-eminently a way of reason and wise understanding.

Religion in this highest sense is the religion we need and this religion is charged with intense mindfulness as regards oneself and other sentient beings. It is the deep consideration and heedfulness as regards others’ rights and privileges which makes one’s own conduct pure and noble, clean and selfless. Of one who is possessed of mindfulness it is said: “While protecting oneself one protects others and while protecting others one protects oneself”.

Actually, religion in its early immature phases is bound up with the fear of the unknown, with vain oblations, bloody sacrifices, the appeasing of fictive gods and godlings, meaningless mummeries, empty prayers and petitions, fasting and flagellations of the flesh, and many other profitless things springing from ignorance. But as man’s intellect masters his environment religion gradually gets free of the stranglehold of superstition and becomes a clear vision of actuality. Such vision alone is able to put man’s spiritual powers to the best possible uses for the good, the happiness and the well-being of all.

This kind of religion is free from all blind belief. It has no truck with dogma or with any sort of spiritual racketeering. It has nothing to do with orthodoxies and heterodoxies, with organizational religiousness. It is above all a matter of

individual thought, feeling and choice. It is not a religion that is stuck in the mud of wealth, power and pomp. Further, it has nothing to do with emperors and kings, statesmen and statecraft, and all such other things that stand established on worldly power which needs to be buttressed with sword and gun, punishment and torture, violence and hurt. True religion can never mix itself with sensual pleasure. This has been stated unambiguously thus: "One is the way to liberation from suffering and another is the way to worldly advantage. The two are ways widely apart." The man of true religion cannot make it a way to world success, without stultifying the very essence of religion. For religion is a way of life that seeks to overcome suffering not by force and compulsion, not by law and ordinance, but by the free and voluntary unfoldment of the human heart's tremendous possibilities for good through self-knowledge, self-reverance and self-taming. It is thus a higher and nobler way than any devised by the worldly minded. To bring it down to the level of the common way by surrendering its lofty principles is to deny to mankind the vision of the pure and speckles path which alone can ultimately save all beings from the curse of sorrow. It is a lowering of the most precious values in our heritage which for all their intangibility are still weightier than the physical things that everywhere overwhelm man generally; it is a pulling down of the noble course leading to the real security of sentient beings built laboriously by the highest of humans.

Such a religion that has no signs of any connection with force we all need urgently if we are to progress in the acquisition of the compassionate outlook, which is the life-blood of a cultivated mental life. In the matter of universal compassion and harmlessness there can be no compromise. Real religion is never separate from these two great characteristics, for these characteristics again are founded on the wisdom which sees all sentient life as always subject to suffering. And one who is firm in the adherence to the truth and wishes to abolish the pain of beings cannot divide his allegiance to the light within him by compromising with methods that make for the exercise of force and compulsion and the increase of the world's suffering.

The religion we need therefore can never be one of faltering loyalty to the truth. It will hang fast to the truth with single-eyed devotion. It will not tarnish its spirituality with worldly alliances. And such religion will naturally be one of fullest tolerance. Live and let live must be a principle that forms the very texture of the heart of the religion we need.

The religion we need is not going to throw up barriers between creeds, races, peoples of different colour, of different countries and of different classes. It is above all not going to outlaw any species of sentient life and put it beyond the reach of pity and compassion and mercy. It is not going to deny safety, security and living space for all beings. It will be a religion of perfect freedom and the only things it will not tolerate is the intolerance of those who deny the sacredness of the last of sentient things.

The religion we need cannot be anti-scientific because it has to be based on reason and the perception of things seen in their true perspective. It would show us how irrational the belief in an external Power which can save us spiritually is, knowing as we do that our spiritual world is something which we ourselves create and which no other has the ability to enter or change or destroy against our will.

The religion we need will teach us to be responsible human beings, not careless of others' rights and good. It will teach us that when we act wrongly we are setting causes in action which may disadvantageously influence humanity even long after we have passed away. It will teach us therefore to avoid doing evil not only for our own good but for the good of all beings of the present and the future too.

A religion which teaches that hatred never ends by hatred but by love and so instruct us to love all sentient beings with a mother's love for her only child, the apple of her eye; a religion that leads men to see life as it really is, that is, as an insatiable hunger, as a want, as suffering, and therefore as something that must be ultimately given up, overcome, renounced, through right knowledge; a religion that is for equality and justice and a religion that is against all heartless competition and trampling down of the weak and the helpless is the religion we need.

The religion we need is one of patience, endurance and long suffering for this world is a place where everything is impermanent, uncertain and changeable, and we are ever in danger of being irritated by or of irritating others. So to keep ourselves calm and serene in the whirling wheel of birth and death we need the strength of bearing up steadfastly, the strength which is compared to that of a mighty army.

Such a religion will bring about the ending of all wars as it did in India three centuries before the birth of Christ when the great and good ruler Dharmasoka renounced war and conquest by the sword for conquest by peace and righteousness.

The kinship of blood and race and the welding power of nationality, these are nothing compared with the kinship of ideas, for instance, like those of universal compassion and harmlessness put into action and spreading wide the spirit of a true culture. The kinship of noble ideas springs from the depths of man's inmost consciousness. The power of the kinship of pure consciousness is better and firmer than that of family or nation. Great and pure ideas can unite peoples living far apart who have not seen each other or who have not directly contacted one another. That is the real power of truth, and if the modern world will change its heart, if it will knock out its bias for violence with the virtue of non-violence, its bias to grasp with power of renunciation, then will be established the religion we need.

With the sentiments which have been last expressed, it becomes clear that the religion we need is essentially a religion of utmost love and mercy and that it cannot be established unless each one of us decides to practise infinite love and infinite compassion right from now on. The religion we need has not found suitable soil to grow in. In the brief periods during which it found proper soil it helped the world and made life happy and pleasant for man and the lesser beings. Let us prepare the ground – our hearts – to receive the seed of the religion of love and compassion today and give it a chance to germinate, and find “fulfillment in leaf and flower and fruit.”