

# World Fellowship of Religions

*A talk given by Master Kirpal Singh at the Regional Conference of World Religions in Tehran, June, 1967. Originally published in the September, 1968 issue of Sat Sandesh*

The World Fellowship of Religions (WFR) has come to stay. Founded in 1957, in the historic metropolitan city of Delhi, as a result of the deliberations at the first conference of world religions, it has worked its way to establish centres in different parts of the world, and to enlist support from high dignitaries in all walks of life.



We would do well to pause for a moment, and ponder over the chaotic conditions that generally prevail, in spite of our loud professions in the cause of lofty ideals and heated protestations against injustice, tyranny and oppression by man against man, section against section, disrupting the social life of the country, and endangering peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the world. Ends and means, be it remembered, go cheek-by-jowl. They cannot be separated and treated singly and in isolation. Without righteous means we cannot achieve righteous ends. 'End justifies the means' is a false conception.

Man, by nature, is a selfish being, and because of this he ever lives in a state of fear, and willy-nilly finds himself involved in strife; strife of one against all, and all against one; for he is not prepared to reconcile himself with the idea that he is just a member, but not an isolated member, in the one great family of man; springing from one supreme source — the Father-God of all of us. This is the one truth that all the religions teach; and it is by realisation of this fundamental truth alone, that we can bring down heaven on earth, for which we so fervently pray all the time; and to our utter dismay find it ever receding away, the more we strive to gain it. It is really a great paradox, an enigma of life, on the proper solution of which lies the welfare of the state, the country, and the world at large.

Time and again, laudable efforts have been made to knit together different nations in the silken bonds of love, amity and concord. The aftermath of the First World War was the founding of the League of Nations, and of the Second, the United Nations Organisation, with a vast and extensive field of cooperation in matters like justice, health, culture, economy, banking etc., and

above all, banning war among the member nations. How far the one succeeded in its endeavours we have already seen; and how far the second will, time alone will show. These are gigantic efforts, no one can deny, and we wish them well because they aim to serve the well being of the people of the world.

The real cause of the social malaise, however, lies far deep in the human mind, too deep for the surgical lancet to reach, and the scientist's shells and missiles to destroy. The state administrations may, to a certain extent, by means of legislative measures and executive fiat, and with the help of the police and the army, control the physical movements of their subjects; but cannot wash and purify the feelings and emotions of the people, nor can they correct their understanding and set right their thoughts.

It is from the abundance of heart that all our actions spring. Unless we get a correct lead in the values of life, the higher spiritual values I mean, we cannot think and act correctly. God is long-suffering, and like a rich man of the parable, patiently awaits his prodigal children to return safely to his fold, after a long sojourn in the wilderness of the world, which serves as a school of correction. He is not far removed from us. The prophet has declared: *Allah is nearer to us than our jugular vein*. And again: *Verily we are for God and verily we shall return to Him*. This being the case, the question that naturally arises is why we do not see Him, and understand His workings? It is not because we search Him without while He is within — like a blind man searching for his needle in the street, when he actually lost it in his own home.

*How woeful it is that we in our own house, have lost the Master of the House, — says a Persian proverb.*

It is because of this forgetfulness of the verities of life that everything has turned topsy-turvy and we, like babes lost in the forest, are ever groping for a way out. Maulana Rumi therefore exhorts us:

*This world is a prison,  
And we all are prisoners therein;  
Break through the roof of thy cell.  
And thus release thy self.*

God made man, and, man made religions as the means of uniting himself with God. Each religion has an essential truth at its core, for otherwise, no religion can endure for long. But the basic religious truths have now become encrusted with the dust of ages, and lie buried under the dead-weight of verbiage encased in the

archaic language of the time, and of the people who lived in different times and different climes in ages past, with ethnic traditions all their own, quite different from those prevailing today. Yet with all these diversities in linguistic trappings, the mass symbolisms we see around us, the essentials they reveal are alike, if we but know how to decipher them correctly.

It is with this object that the World Fellowship of Religions has come into being, so that the representatives of different religions may have some common forum to sit together, shoulder to shoulder, in an honest attempt to understand the unities of human life, in the ever-revolving panorama of apparently diverse forms and modes of life and thought, that are surreptitiously eating into the very vitals of the social order in which we are.

Man, then, is the first and last in God's creation. He is the greatest handiwork of God. Constitutionally, all men are constituted alike both in inner and outer formations; subject alike to disease, decay and death so far as the outer man of flesh and bones is concerned. Again, all of us, besides being human in appearance, are also human in feelings and emotions, because we are ensouled entities or embodied souls, and as such are one on this level as well. Last but not the least, we are one on the spiritual level as well, for spirit in all of us is one, and of the same essence as that of God.

This being the case, we are all worshippers of the same God, who is One without a second. *There is no God but God*, is what all the prophets have declared with one voice; and a path to Him can be gained through a life of rectitude and abstinence from indulgence, as prescribed by *Shariat*, or the code of social and moral conduct, which too, is essentially the same as given by all the law-givers of the world, from prehistoric times to this day. Ethical life, then, is a stepping-stone to spirituality, and it comprises in its fold divine attributes of purity, love, non-injury, truthfulness, continence, selfless-service and sacrifice. This constitutes the first step, and also includes within its fold all types of rituals like fasts and vigils, pilgrimages, charities and the like. But mark this — it is good as far as it goes, but surely not enough.

Next, we come to the core of the teachings as given by all the world teachers: Zoroaster, Vedic Rishis, Moses, Buddha, Mahavira, Shankara, Christ, Mohammed, Kabir and Nanak. All agree as to the nature of the God-head. Absolute God is an abstraction, something imageless which no one has seen and no one can ever see. Then there is the God-in-expression power, and it has variously been described by the sages and seers as the Father of Lights, *Nooran-ala Noor*, *Swayam Jyoti*, speaking in the midst of "thunder and

lightning," coming from above, as *Akashvani* or *Bang-i-Asmani*, *Saut* or *Kalam-i-Qadeem*, *Sruti* or *Sraosha*, *Naam* or *Naad*, Music of the Spheres and so on. These are not mere figurative words, as many may be prone to take them for, but essentially true in character.

The founders of all the religions gave a direct contact of the Light and Sound of God to their innermost circle of disciples, and enjoined them to develop the same, so as to become true *momins* in the real sense of the word. This is the great bed-rock where all religions meet and stand upon. This is the terra-firma which we have to realise, by practical study of the different scriptures, for they all teach essentially the basic truth of the Oneness of God, and the saving life-lines provided by Him in every individual, as the way-back for His children to His eternal home.

Man has but to re-discover himself; for he lives, moves and has his very being in Truth, the Unchangeable Permanence, with three-fold attributes of Love, Light and Life, which eternally shine like a lighthouse in the turbulent waters of the world. All this is not only a possibility, but actually within the reach of all, and he who can dive deep from the surface of his being to the centre of his being, embraces the totality of his being and gets at the priceless crest jewel of his soul, finding which nothing else remains to be found; for he who grasps the human in himself understands all mankind.

This is the one grand truth to which all our efforts are directed and for which the World Fellowship of Religions stands.

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All the religions agree that Life, Light and Love are the three phases of the Supreme Source of all that exists. These essential attributes of the divinity that is **One**, though designated differently by the prophets and peoples of the world, are also wrought in the very pattern of every sentient being. It is in this vast ocean of Love, Light and Life that we live, have our very being and move about; and yet, strange as it may seem, like the proverbial fish in water, we do not know this truth and much less practise it in our daily life; and hence the endless fear, helplessness, and misery that we see around us in the world; in spite of all our laudable efforts and sincere strivings to get rid of them. Love is the only touch-stone wherewith we can measure of [our] understanding of the

twin principles of Life and Light in us, and how far we have travelled on the path of self-knowledge and God knowledge. God is love, the soul in Man is a spark of that love, and again is the link between God and man on the one hand, and man and God's creation on the other.

It is, therefore, said, *He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.*

Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh says, *Verily I say unto thee: that whose heart is bubbling over with love, he alone shall find God.* Love, in a nutshell, is the fulfilment of the law of Life and Light.

All the prophets, all the religions, and all the scriptures hang on two commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and thy mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it — "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Questioned as to our attitude towards our enemies, Christ said: "Love thine enemies, bless them that curse thee, do good to them that hate thee, pray for them that despitefully use thee and persecute thee, that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven. Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

With the yard-stick of love with us the very essence of God's character, let us probe our hearts. Is our life an efflorescence of God's love? Are we ready to serve one another with love? Do we keep our hearts open to the healthy influences coming from outside? Are we patient and tolerant towards those who differ from us? Are our minds coextensive with the creation of God, and ready to embrace the totality of his being? Do we bleed inwardly at the sight of the down-trodden and the depressed? Do the distresses of others distress us? Do we pray for the sick and suffering humanity? If we do not do any of these things, we are yet far removed from God and from religion, no matter how loud we may be in our talk, and pious in our platitudes, and pompous in our proclamations. With all our inner craving for peace, we have failed and failed hopelessly to serve the cause of God's peace on earth.

Ends and means are inter-locked things and cannot be separated from each other. We cannot have peace so long we try to achieve it with war-like means, and with the weapons of destruction and extinction. With the germs of hatred in our hearts, racial and colour bars rankling within us, thoughts of political domination and economic exploitation surging in our blood-stream, we are working for wrecking the social structure which we have so strenuously

built, and not for peace unless it be peace of the grave, but certainly not for a living peace born of mutual love and respect; trust and concord that may go to ameliorate mankind, and transform this earth into a paradise for which we so fervently pray for, and preach from pulpits and platforms, and yet, as we proceed, it recedes away into the distant horizon.

Where then lies the remedy? Is the disease past all cure? No, it is not so. 'Life and Light of God' are still there to help and guide us in the heart of our hearts and do not see things in their proper perspective. This vast outer world is nothing but a reflex of our own little world within us. The seeds of discord and disharmony, in the soil of our mind, bear fruit in and around us, and do so in abundance. We are what we think, and we see the world with the smoke-coloured glasses that we choose to put on.

It is a proof positive of one thing only, that we have so far not known the 'Life and Light of God' and much less realized 'God-in-man'. We are off centre in the game of life. We are playing at the circumference only, and never had a dip in the deepest waters of life at the centre. This is why we constantly find ourselves caught in the vortex of the swirling waters on the surface. The life at the circumference of our being is, in fact, not different from the life at the centre of our being. The two are, in fact, not un-identical, yet when one is divorced from the other, they look dissimilar. Hence the strange paradox, the physical life though a manifestation of God, is full of toil and turmoil, storm and stress, dissipation and disruption. In our enthusiasm and zest for outer life on the plane of the senses, we have strayed too far away from our centre, nay we have altogether lost sight of it, and worse still have cut the very moorings of our barque, and no wonder then we find ourselves tossing helplessly on the sea of life. Rudderless and without a compass to guide our course, we are unwittingly a prey to chance winds and waters, and cannot see the shoals, the sand-banks and the submerged rocks with which our way is strewn. In this frightful plight we are drifting along the onrushing current of life — wither we know not.

This world, after all, is not and cannot, be so bad as we take it to be; it is a manifestation of the Life-principle of the Creator, and is being sustained by His Light. His Love is at the bottom of all this. All that we have to do is correctly to learn and understand the basic live-truths, as are embodied in our scriptures, practise them carefully under the guidance of some theo-centric saint. These scriptures came into being by God-inspired prophets and, as such, some God-intoxicated person or a Godman can give us a proper interpretation of them, initiate us in to their right import, by

reconciling the seeming discrepancies in thought, and finally help us inwardly on the God-path. Without such a practical guidance, both without and within, we are entrapped in the magic-spell of forms and minds, cannot possibly reach at the esoteric truths lying under a mass of verbiage of the bygone ages, and now solidified into fossils with the lapse of time into institutionalised forms, formulae and formularies of the ruling class.

Every religion has, of necessity, a three-fold aspect:

First, the traditional, comprising myths and legends for the lay brethren;

Secondly, the philosophical treatises based on reason to satisfy the hunger of the intelligentsia, concerned more with the why and wherefore of things than anything else, with great stress on theory of the subject and emphasis on ethical development, which is so very necessary for spiritual growth; and

Thirdly, the esoteric part the central core in every religion, meant for the chosen few, the genuine seekers after truth. The last part deals with the mystic personal experiences of the founders of all religions and other advanced souls. It is this part, called mysticism, the core of all religions, that has to be sifted, enshrined in the heart for practice and experience.

These inner experiences of all the sages and seers, from time immemorial, are the same, irrespective of the religio-social orders to which they belonged, and deal, in the main, with the Light and Life of God — no matter at what level; and the methods and means for achieving direct results are also similar. "Religious experience", says Plotinus, "lies in the finding of true home by the exile", meaning the pilgrim soul, to whom the Kingdom of God is, at present, just a lost province. Similarly, Bergson, another great philosopher, tells us: "The surest way to Truth is by perception, by intuition, by reasoning to a certain point, and then taking a mortal leap."

Thus we have seen that 'Life and Light of God' constitute the only common ground at which all religions do meet; and if we could take hold of these saving life-lines, we can become live-centers of spirituality, no matter to what religion we owe our allegiance for the fulfilment of our social needs, and the development of our moral well-being.

Like the practice of lighting of candles, symbolical of the inner light, there is another practice of ringing the bell or bells in churches and temples, and giving of *Azaan* by *Mouzan*, which has a much deeper inner significance than is realised, and surprisingly enough, is taken to be just a call to the faithful for prayer. Herein lies the great

hiatus between learning and wisdom which are at poles asunder; for this too is symbolic of the music of the soul, the audible life-stream, music of the spheres, the actual life principal pulsating in all the creation.

I would like to emphasize one thing — that all religions are profoundly good, truly worthy of our love and respect. Our object is not to found any new religion, as we have already enough of them, nor to evaluate the extant religions that we have with us. The most pressing need of the time, therefore, is to study our religious scriptures thoughtfully, and to reclaim our lost heritage.

"Everyone has in him," says a saint, "a pearl of priceless value, but as he does not know how to unearth it, he is going about with a beggar's bowl." It is a practical subject, and even to call it a religion of soul is a misnomer, for soul has no religion whatsoever.

We may, if you like, call it the science of soul, for it is truly a science, more scientific than all the known sciences of the world, capable of yielding valuable and verifiable results, quite precise and definite. By contacting the Light and Life principles, the primordial manifestations of God within the laboratory of the man-body, which all the scriptures declare to be a veritable 'temple of God,' we can virtually draw upon the 'Bread and Water of life,' rise into cosmic awareness, and gain immortality.

This is the be-all and end-all of all religions; and embedded as we all are in the One Divinity, we ought to represent the noble truth of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is the living Word of the living God, and has a great potential in it. It has rightly been said: *Man does not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God.* And this Word of God is an unwritten law and an unspoken language. He, who, by the Word, finds himself, can never again lose anything in the world. He, who once grasps the human in himself, understands all mankind. It is that knowledge, by knowing which, everything else becomes known. This is an immutable law of the Unchangeable Permanence, and is not designed by any human head. It is the *Surti* of the Vedas, the *Naad* or *Udgit* of the *Upanishads*, the *Sraosha* of the *Zind Avastha*, the Holy Ghost of the Gospels, the Lost Word of the Masons, the *Kalma* of the Prophet Mohammad, the *Saut* of the Sufis, the *Shabd* or *Naam* of the Sikh scriptures, Music of the Spheres and of All Harmonies of Plato and Pythagoras, and the Voice of Silence of the Theosophists. It can be contacted, grasped, and communed with by every sincere seeker after truth, for the good not only of himself but of the entire humanity, for it acts as a sure safety valve against all dangers with which mankind is threatened in this atomic age.

The only pre-requisite for acquiring this spiritual treasure, in one's own soul, is self-knowledge. This is why sages and seers, in all times and in all climes, have in unmistakable terms, laid emphasis on self-analysis. Their clarion call to humanity has always been — *Man know thyself*. The Aryan thinkers in the hoary past called it *Atam Gian* or knowledge of the *atman* or soul. The ancient Greeks and Romans in their turn, respectively, gave to it the name of *gnathi seauton* and *nosce teipsum*. The Muslim divines called it *Khud-Shanasi*, and Guru Nanak, Kabir and others stressed the need for *Apo cheena* or self-analysis; and declared that so long a man did not separate his soul from body and mind, he lived only a superficial life of delusion on the physical plane of existence. True knowledge is undoubtedly an action of the soul, and is perfect without the senses. This then is the acme of all investigations carried out by man, since the first flicker of self-awakening dawned in him.

This is the one truth I learnt in my life, both in theory and practice, from my Master, Baba Sawan Singh Ji Maharaj, and have placed it before the peoples in the West and the East during my extensive tours, and have found it of ready acceptance everywhere as a current coin, for it is the sole panacea for all ills of the world, as well as ills of the flesh, to which man is a natural heir through the working of the inexorable law of action and reaction — ye shall reap, as ye shall sow.

All our religions are, after all, an expression of the inner urge felt by man, from time to time, [to] find a way out of the discord without, into the halcyon calm of the soul within. *The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not*. But we are so constituted by nature that we feel restless, until we find a rest in the causeless cause. If we live up to our scriptures, and realise the Light and Life of God within us, then surely, as day follows night, 'love' would reign supreme in the universe, and we will see nothing but the unseen hand of God working everywhere.

We must then sit together as members of the one great family of man, so that we may understand each other. We are, above everything else, one from the level of God as our Father, from the level of man as His children, and from the level of Worshippers of the same truth or Power of God, called by so many names.

In this august assembly of the spiritually awakened, we can learn the 'great truth' of oneness of life vibrating in the universe. If we do this, then surely this world, with so many forms and colors, will appear a veritable handiwork of God, and we shall verily perceive the same life-impulse enlivening all of us. As His own dear children embedded in Him, like so many roses in His rose bed, let us join together in sweet remembrance of God, and pray to Him for the well-being of the world, in this hour of imminent danger of annihilation that stares us in the face. May God, in His infinite mercy, save us all, whether we deserve it or not.

