

PODCAST 220, WE ARE MISTAKEN

Om Sri Sai Ram

Prasanthi Sandesh, episode 220.

Thank you for your time and for listening to our talks. By Bhagavan's Grace, they have been receiving the attention of many of the devotees and many say that they are benefited by these talks. We have been doing this Seva as a team and we consider it as Seva because it's all Swami's Grace and the credit goes to you, our active devoted listeners. Thank you! May Bhagavan bless you!

Today's topic is this. **'We are mistaken'. Where are we mistaken? Why are we mistaken? Why?** These are the three things which will be discussed in this podcast.

We often make use of the word 'conscience' or *antahkaran*, as in Sanskrit A N T A H K A R A N. *Antahkaran* is conscience. But what we call conscience is not truly conscience and therefore, we never come to know what the real conscience is. Here is where we are mistaken. We accept something as being the conscience but that is not the true conscience. Let us try to analyse why and how this happens, before we look into the reality.

What do you think of as being the conscience? A man steals. Something in him says, 'Don't steal. Stealing is wrong.' A man eats meat and something inside him says, 'Do not eat meat. It is bad.' A man gets drunk in a pub and something inside him says, 'Do not drink liquor.' This voice is what you call the conscience. This voice is what you call 'inner voice'.

But this is not the real thing! It is only the voice of the society in you. It's not your own voice. It is not the voice of your own inner self. It is the teaching of society. So if you are born into a vegetarian family, where from your very childhood you have heard that 'to eat meat is wrong, and that it is a sin,' only then will there be a voice inside you when you eat non-vegetarian food. Yes, there will be a voice inside you that says, 'It is evil. It is a sin, don't do it.'

This is not the real inner voice because someone who has been raised in a non-vegetarian family will not hear this voice speaking to him. If you think this is the conscience, then you will have to admit that there are many versions of the conscience in the world. Then you will have to concede that the inner voice of the Divine in you says different things to different people. To one it says to eat meat, while to another it forbids it!

The differences are because of the different rules in the various societies. It's not the voice of conscience. On the day that you hear the voice of your conscience, when the real conscience is experienced, that voice is one and the same everywhere in the world. It's not many voices. There are no separate consciences, like the conscience of a Hindu or the conscience of a Muslim or the conscience of a Christian or a Jain. But, what you call conscience is different for a Hindu, different for a Jain and different again for a Buddhist. Even amongst Hindus, it would be one

voice for a Brahmin, which is the highest class, another for a Kshatriya, the ruling class and yet another for a Sudra, the serving class.

Societies have been very clever. Before you can hear what your own inner voice is, it imposes a voice on you and tells you that this is your inner voice. However, society cannot do otherwise and there are many reasons why it does this. It is pointless to blame society because every society has its own problems.

Not everyone is able to discover his own true inner conscience. If society also does not give man a conscience, then man becomes an animal. So, society could just leave it up to you. But, society cannot leave it up to you, until you discover it on your own because the fear is that you'll behave like an animal. It is not a certainty that you'll be able to find your own real conscience. And what can happen if society leaves it up to you and you are not able to discover your own conscience, then it may be too late even for the society to give you a conscience.

That's why in societies where the impact of religion has become looser, where education by the family has diminished, and where secular governments have taken over the responsibility for education, not only does the voice of the real conscience not arise, but the voice of the pseudo-conscience also disappears. In this situation, man starts to live in a licentious, immoral society, which is almost sub-human. That society is helpless because then men in that society cannot be trusted.

So, before you can search for your own conscience, society creates a substitute conscience in you. And every society will do this in a different way, because every society has a different understanding, a different belief system, tradition and culture.

One society can't imagine someone marrying his own first cousin. They simply cannot think of it. But another society can do it very easily. Not only they can do it easily, but they also prefer it. They see no problem in it. It all depends on their social beliefs. And the belief system of a society comes from thousands of years of a particular geographical, historical, and cultural tradition.

There are people in India, for example in Rajasthan, where there is a certain group whose tradition is that unless a boy is a skilled thief, he cannot get a girl's hand in marriage. The bride's family will ask him how many burglaries he has committed and how many robberies he has participated in. Also, how many times they have imprisoned him due to the robberies. If a boy has not committed any burglaries or robberies, or has never been imprisoned, no family will give a girl's hand in marriage to such a "good-for-nothing" fellow! Do you believe that? So, there are societies of thieves, where stealing is a common practice. Being skilled in stealing is a qualification in that society!

There are Pakhtoons, P A K H T O O N S, on the border of Pakistan. A friend of mine went on a visit to Pakhtoonistan and when he returned he told me that when he entered the area of the Pakhtoons, he was advised never to travel in an open jeep after sunset, because Pakhtoon boys often shoot at the drivers or the passengers.

He said, 'But I am not in any conflict or fight with anybody. So why would anyone shoot at me?' He was told that it is not a question of conflict or quarrel. It is just for target practice. Youngsters were learning to aim. They see someone driving in a moving vehicle and they just shoot at him! Their logic is, if you can shoot at a bird in order to learn to aim, then what is the problem about shooting a man for the same reason? That is their logic. Moreover, if it is a man that you will eventually have to kill, then why involve the poor birds at all? Why not learn to aim directly with actual targets? However, a Pakhtoon boy will not have a bad conscience about what he is doing because it is not a problem in his society.

In Japan suicide is considered a very dignified act. If a man fails in his duty in some way, then it is thought to be honourable that he commits suicide. They think it is honourable and moral, and the Japanese conscience urges him to commit suicide immediately. If he does not, then it is considered a disgrace. Hence, in Japan *harakheri*, meaning suicide, is a very common act. It does not happen like this anywhere else in the world. To us, it seems very strange.

But here in India too, the Jains believe that *santhara*, S A N T H A R A, to be actually fasting until death, is an honourable act. If somebody dies while fasting as a religious act, and if death happens while meditating as a discipline, Jains don't call it suicide. This is *santhara*. He'll be very much honoured because it is believed that this man has left his body in the right way. But in any other country this will be seen as a suicide and this man will be a criminal in the eye of the law. See this!

If you think about the different customs and practices in the world, you'll realise that there are millions and millions of consciences. Millions of consciences, - the plural form. This is not the authentic conscience. No! Please note ***the authentic conscience is one and the same in all people.*** That voice is exactly the same. Those other voices are from society.

But when children are not aware of anything, we start putting the voices of society into them, and whatever you teach a child, he learns it. Scientists say that man acquires seventy-five percent of his knowledge before the age of seven. Seventy-five percent of all that is essential in life! So, this conscience is almost completely created in the first seven years of a child's life and therefore it becomes very difficult to change it because it becomes his foundation. So it is on this foundation that man's personality forms, and it is on this foundation that the palace of man's whole life is built. Then, whenever he does anything, it is the voice of this conscience that speaks to him. If he tries to act contrary to this conscience, it says, 'Don't do it.'

So, society creates this conscience as a part of its two-fold arrangement. It creates laws on the outside, so that nobody does anything wrong. But no matter how skilfully the outer laws are created, there are always even more skilful criminals. This is a fact. We all know that. After all, it is man who creates laws and so man can also find ways to circumvent them and commit crimes. So as you create laws, man will find his own ways and means to circumvent them and commit crimes. No matter how strict the laws on the outside are, they cannot do away with crime completely.

So the society makes another arrangement. It also creates a conscience inside man. On the outside, the fear of the law prevents him from doing criminal acts. This is an

outside pattern, while on the inside, his own conscience prevents him from doing wrong by reminding him, "Don't do this. This is a sin."

In some way you can manage to ignore the law. But it is very difficult to avoid the condemnation of your own conscience. This is why a person who obeys his conscience is more respected in the society, whereas the one who does not obey his conscience is condemned. The one who obeys his conscience is considered virtuous while the one who does not is considered or condemned as a sinner. The one who obeys his conscience is promised heaven by the society, and the one who does not is threatened with the punishment of hell. So this is the inner arrangement.

So there's an outer arrangement and an inner arrangement because of this conscience which is created by society. But please remember, it is not your real conscience at all. On the one hand, it is the courts, outside of you, which go on prohibiting based on the laws. Then on the other hand, the inner prohibition which later manifests in the courts, has been implanted within you by that society. Therefore, this court also insists that you obey the conscience created by the society. You have to follow it, otherwise you'll be punished.

So man is bound between these two so that he cannot do anything wrong. In this way he may be able to avoid doing wrong.

Here I should also tell you that not to do wrong is not the same as doing right. It is possible that because of these two barriers, man does not become immoral. But not to be immoral is not the same thing as being moral. It is possible that you don't become a criminal or anti-social; but not to become a criminal or anti-social is not the same thing as being religious. This is a very negative arrangement. So we have dealt with this mistake, which is ***what we think is our conscience is not the real conscience.***

We have also dealt with the conscience that we think is developed by society and which works in two ways -- the outer way and the inner way. The inner way tells you that if you act against it, that would be a sin. The outer way gives you honour if you follow society's created conscience.

We'll analyse further in the next talk.

Sai Ram. Thank you.