

PODCAST 221, TRUE CONSCIENCE

Om Sri Sai Ram

Prasanthi Sandesh, Podcast episode 221

Thank you for your time and for listening to our podcasts.

We have already discussed the fact that the conscience which we usually refer to every time is wrong. The conscience that we speak of is a social conscience only. It is the conscience which has been thrust upon us by society, rules, regulations, traditions, superstitions, and so on and so forth. So, this so-called conscience is not the true conscience. It is only a social conscience. This phenomenon which you call 'conscience' takes you into suppression, guilt and hypocrisy. But it is useful to society because then society can have some kind of control over you.

In this episode, let us try to investigate what the true conscience is. The conscience that I would like to share with you in this talk is a search for the voice of your own inner consciousness, your own spontaneous voice, untainted by society. Religion is a search for that conscience.

What is conscience? Let us take the example of Jesus Christ, when a lady who was guilty of adultery was brought to His presence. As per the norms of those days, anyone who committed adultery had to be stoned to death.

When everybody was ready with their stones to pelt on her, Jesus appeared there and said, "Yes, you can stone her to death, in obedience to the law of the day. Those of you who have not committed any sin so far come forward and stone her."

On hearing this, everybody turned back. They could not answer themselves because no one was free from guilt or sin.

Then Jesus came and said, "I have not committed any sin, but oh woman, go forth. Commit no sin anymore! Don't commit any sin hereafter."

But that lady pleaded with him, "At least you punish me for committing this!" "You punish me, my Lord," she pleaded with him.

Then Jesus said, "Who am I to punish you?"

He closed his eyes for a moment, opened them again and said to the woman, "You just go because only before the Almighty Lord can you be judged. Who am I to pass judgment? Who am I to pass judgment on you? I did not create you, nor did I give you life, nor am I in any way a controller of your life. So how can I judge you? Oh! All I can say to you is never to judge anybody. Now you can go."

This is the voice of conscience! This is not the voice of society! It is not written in any scripture. It's not taught to someone by society. This is an unlearned, spontaneous response!

If you had asked Buddha, the same voice would have spoken through Him. If you had asked Mahavira, the same voice would have spoken through Him also. It is not the voice of a person. It is the voice of the impersonal, universal reality that lives within each person. It is the consciousness hidden within. This is what is called the true conscience. You all have it! But it is dormant. You have to seek it. It is not developed within you at all. It is there because your consciousness is there.

Consciousness has a voice, but it is hidden. The voice, which keeps pouring out of you, belongs to others' voices, which have been fed into you. Those voices are like the voices of a gramophone record. They are not the voice of your consciousness. Like the *gurus* on a gramophone record, society has created *gurus* within you. The needle of your intellect moves over them and the sound of a voice comes out saying, "This is good, and this is bad."

The one who comes to discover that the conscience is the one who has the capacity to put aside those ideas of good and bad, and has the courage to go within and look for the face that belonged to him even before he was born, the face that remains his, even when he goes into deep sleep. In the middle of the dark night, when there are not even dreams, he sees that face that will continue to be his even when he dies and his body disintegrates.

One suggestion is to do this search: Whenever you feel inside you that this is good and this is bad, this is right or this is wrong, then make a little observation: Is this your own awareness or a reflection of the society in which you are born?

I'll give you another example. Adi Shankara became a *sannyasin*, a renunciate, from a very early age. His mother was old. He was born late to her and his father who had already died. So the old woman was unable to gather courage to stop him from becoming a sannyasi.

As the story goes, Shankara was swimming in the river one day when a crocodile caught him by his legs. The whole village gathered to rescue him, and his mother also came running.

Shankara shouted to his mother, "I can pray to the crocodile to release me and there's a chance that he might listen. But what about my *sannyasa*? If you agree to my sannyas, I have a feeling that the crocodile will release me." This was the situation. It meant that sannyasa was better than his death. And no one agrees to sannyas or anything less than that!

She said, "I give you my word that I'll agree to your sannyas, but first save yourself somehow!"

Who knows? There might have been some kind of friendship between Shankara and that crocodile! Some connection from a past life must have been there because the crocodile let go of Shankara's feet. He survived and he became a *sannyasin*.

Now, the other part of the story goes like this: As he was about to leave, his mother made him promise that he would attend to her last rites himself. It was a complex matter in those days. No one knew where Shankara would be wandering. In those days, all travel was on foot, and he was able to travel through the whole country as a beggar, but still he promised.

Then Shankara's mother became ill, and when he heard about it, he ran to her. His fellow *sannyasins*, his own disciples, said to him, "Who is your mother? Who is your father? For a *sannyasin*, there is neither mother nor father, and you have made that promise in your ignorance. You yourself say that the world is an illusion, maya. So what are words? What is a promise? And who is there to fulfill them? It's all a dream! You yourself say so!"

Shankara sat down and closed his eyes, and then he stood up saying, "No! I have to go! The world may be an illusion. All relationships may be false. But something which is deep within me tells me that I will have to go!"

We may have doubts, because who knows? This may be the real conscience, or it may not be. Because, after all, she was his mother. He had promised her. This could all have been just an imprint from his conditioning, yes. So, what should be done now?

What should you do if you have given your word and you have given it to your own mother who may be dying, and these may be her last moments? It could very well just be a voice from the society. But very soon, his companions and his disciples could see that it was not the voice of the society.

Shankara arrived at the village. His family was a Namboodri family, the highest caste of Brahmins from South India. The whole village objected, "How can a *sannyasin* son cremate his own mother? Who is a father to him? Who is a mother? How can a *sannyasin* do her cremation? This should not be! This will defile *sannyasa*!"

But Shankara said, "I am determined to do all her last rites!"

No one from the village went to the funeral. The corpse was heavy. His mother had a heavy build, and Shankara was thin and small. It was difficult for him to take the body alone to the cremation place. So what he did was he took a sword, closed his eyes, and cut his mother's body into three pieces. He carried his mother's corpse to the cremation place in three trips. This man would have a conscience given by society. Someone who can cut his mother's body in three pieces? Even his friends and his disciples were puzzled. They wondered about what he was doing.

Shankara said to them, "The world is an illusion. Moreover, it was a dead body and there was no harm in cutting it up because I asked my inner conscience."

This is what the true conscience is! You have to put aside the conscience that society gives, the conscience that all societies give, without exception. Leave only one, and then slowly start looking within yourself. A moment will come when everything will be clearly visible to you about what has come from society and what is your own.

Whenever it's your voice, there is no other voice contradicting it. It is unanimous! However, with the voice of society, an opposing voice is always present.

No matter how much your so-called conscience may be telling you that stealing is bad, there is another part that tells you, "Go ahead! Do it! Who will know anyway?"

One part says, "Non-vegetarianism is not bad!" Another part says, "The whole world is doing it! Why are you the only one trying to be good? Why have you taken on the whole burden?" Or another voice says that alcohol is bad while the other says, "The whole world is drinking! Why are you wasting your life? Drink!"

So, one characteristic of a false conscience is that an opposing voice is always present. **There is no opposing voice in the real conscience! It is one single voice. There is no voice opposing it.** So, as long as you hear the sound of an opposing voice, know well that is the conscience given by society and not the conscience given by the Divine.

One day you will find that one voice, just like Shankara did. He got the idea to cut the corpse up and so he picked up a sword and did it! He did not hesitate, not even for a single moment. He did not think, "First, let me think about whether to cut my mother's body or not. I may be considered violent, and they will ask what am I doing? This is unprecedented. Nobody has ever done this. No son has done it, and particularly a son like me, a *sannyasi*, has never done this." But no! He did it! He carried the body and burned the body and returned very happily because the task was finished.

This was his own voice. Not once, during Shankara's whole life, did anyone ever hear the slightest mention that he thought that Shankara had done something wrong.

When you listen to the so-called conscience, the one that you call conscience, whether you follow it or not, you will repent either way. This is the second characteristic. If you listen to your false conscience, then you will also feel regret.

You have not stolen or done something wrong because you have been listening to this conscience all your life. But you will feel that you have missed something that other people have done. You will think, "That was a moment, an opportunity, and I missed it! That man did it and he was not caught! The other man did it and he became a minister in the government! Another person did it and he achieved so much! And here I am! Dying of hunger and of poverty! What meaningless idealism have I fallen prey to?"

And if you do what these people have done, again, even then, you will regret it because if you do it, you will feel self-rejection, remorse and guilt. You will think, "It would have been better if I had not done it."

So the conscience given by society will make you feel guilty no matter what you do. No matter what! Because there are always two voices, but you can agree only with one of the two. So what will happen to the other one? The other part will wait and it will make you feel repentant afterwards. However, if you listen to the voice of your true conscience, there will never be any guilt or regret. Never!

The third characteristic is that the conscience that you live by creates a memory because no action that arises from it is ever total. It is always partial because half of you is always opposed to it. Even if you decide to steal, you do it half-heartedly.

Have you ever met a thief who is a total thief? Can you find even a single person who is totally dishonest? To be totally dishonest means that you don't have even a faint idea that you are doing something wrong or something bad that you should not be doing. It would mean that there is not even a separate voice somewhere that says, "This is dishonest!" No, it would be very difficult to find a totally dishonest person.

And in a world of dishonest people, it would also be very difficult to find a totally honest person either, a person who would not feel in his heart that there was no harm done, even though they had done the wrong action as judged by society.

This feeling would be there if you follow this social conscience. If you follow this conscience, what happens? It will create a memory because your action will be partial. The memory will remain stuck in the mind and a feeling will linger, "Why did I not do it totally, whole-heartedly?"

But the conscience that we are talking about, the true conscience, does not create any memory. A total act creates no memory! It is done, it is finished, it is gone!

The fourth and last characteristic is that if you live according to the false conscience, you will be bound by your actions because they will create a memory. It will stick in your mind and it will not go away.

If the action is total, then no memories are created; no boundaries are created due to that action. The mind will always remain free. Whatever you do with your total heart will not become a burden on your heart. And so, whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly. If you do it half-heartedly, it is a sin. Whatever you do, if you do it wholeheartedly, it is a virtue. That is the definition.

Please remember that whatever is done half-heartedly is a sin, even if it is to build a temple half-heartedly. Whatever is done wholeheartedly is a virtue, even if you steal. But it's not possible to steal when you are wholehearted, although you can build a temple in a half-hearted way!

So, the first word is conscience, and the second word is what will be dealt with in the next episode.

Thank you for your time.

Sai Ram