

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Q. 290, IGNORANCE AND RELIGION

Om Sri Sai Ram

Welcome to Prasanthi Sandesh, Question and Answer session.

Q. 290:

The first question is: ***What is the effect of ignorance on religion? Can anyone afford to be ignorant while being religious? If he is religious and continues to be ignorant, what is the outcome? What are the results?***

Let me try to analyse this to a certain extent.

Religion is a very complex phenomenon. It is the complexity, which has to be understood.

People cannot tolerate ignorance. They hide it because it is difficult to know that one does not know. It is against the ego. So, people believe!

These belief systems function to protect their egos. They are initially helpful, but in the long range they are very harmful. In the beginning they seem to be protective, but in the end they are very destructive because the orientation is on ignorance.

Religion is light. Religion is understanding. Religion is awareness. Religion is authenticity. But a major part of humanity remains in a state of ignorance. So, this belief system is simply to avoid the reality, to avoid the gap that one feels in one's own being, to avoid the black hole of ignorance

Well, let's know the features and effects of ignorance. The people who are ignorant are fanatics. They cannot even tolerate that there can be other sorts of religions in the world. Their religion is **the** religion because they are so afraid of their ignorance. If there is some other religion also, then they will become suspicious, then doubt will arise. Then they will not be so certain. So, to gain certainty, they become very stubborn, madly stubborn.

They cannot read others' scriptures. Yes, they cannot! They cannot listen to other interpretations of truth. They cannot! Their revelation is the only revelation and their prophet is the only prophet. Everything else is absolutely false! These people talk in terms of an absolute, while a man of understanding is always relative.

So the people of ignorance have done great harm to religion. Because of these people, religion itself looks a little stupid. Remember not to be a victim to such ignorance!

Almost ninety-nine per cent of humanity lives in this state, and that state is in no way better than irreligion. Maybe it is even worse because an irreligious person is not a fanatic. An irreligious person is more open. He is at least ready to listen, ready to talk things out, ready to argue, ready to seek and enquire. But the first type of religious person is not even ready to listen.

Well, I'll give you one historical fact. Mohammedans burnt one of the greatest treasures of the world, the Library of Alexandria. This library was the greatest in the ancient world. Yes, this library was the greatest. The fire continued for almost six months. The library was so big that it took six months for it to be burnt down completely! See this! And the man who burnt it was a Mohammedan, Calipha.

Thus, Mohammedans burnt one of the greatest treasures of the world. And the man who burnt it was, as I said, a Mohammedan Calipha, C A L I P H A. His logic is the logic of this category of ignorance.

These books contained all that humanity had learnt up to that time and it was really more than we know now. That library contained every bit of information about Lemuria, Atlantis and all the scriptures of Atlantis, the continent which has disappeared into the Atlantic. It was the most ancient library, a great preserve. Had it still been here, humanity would have been totally different because we are now rediscovering many things which had already been discovered then.

With a Quran in one hand and with a burning torch in the other, the Calipha said to the librarian, "I have a simple question. In this big library millions of books are there. If this library contains only that which is contained in the Quran, then it's not needed. It is superfluous. If it contains more than what is contained in the Quran then it is wrong. Then, it has to be destroyed immediately. Either way, it has to be destroyed. If it contains the same as the Quran, then it is superfluous. Why does man have such a big library unnecessarily? The Quran is enough! And if you say that it contains many more things than what is in the Quran, then those things are bound to be wrong because the Quran is the truth."

Holding the Quran in one hand, he started the fire with the other hand in the name of the Quran. Mohammed must have cried and wept that day in heaven because in his name the library was being burnt. So, this is the first type of religion.

Always remain alert, because this stubborn man exists in everybody. Please note this! This is a feature of ignorance. I repeat, this stubborn man exists in everybody so everybody has to be aware not to be caught in that sort of ignorance! Only then can you realise the higher sorts of religion.

The problem is that we are brought up almost in ignorance. We are conditioned by it. So it becomes almost normal. It looks normal. A Hindu is brought up with the idea that others are wrong. Even if he is taught to be tolerant, that tolerance is of one who knows, and looks towards others who do not know. A Jain is absolutely brought up with the belief that only he is right. Others are all ignorant, stumbling, groping in darkness. This conditioning can become so deep that you may forget that it is conditioning and that you have to rise above it.

So my friends, you must have understood by now that in spite of following a religion, if one remains ignorant, these will be the effects. Let me add some more.

One can become used to a certain conditioning and one can start thinking as if it is one's nature or as if it is the truth. So, one has to be very alert and watchful in order to find this lowest possible conditioning in oneself and not to get caught in it.

Sometimes, we go on working hard in transforming our lives and we go on believing in our first religion, while at the same time, being ignorant. Whenever you stay at that level, it is not possible to transform your life because you are trying something which is so low that it cannot be really religious.

So, this ignorance is the basis for some people who are religious and so, religion remains just a name. Then, you work continuously on yourself with the wrong attitude and your false nature starts leading. You start functioning the way you want to function. Yes, the habit can become your second nature. Unfortunately, sometimes if it becomes your first nature, then our true nature is completely forgotten.

The characteristic of these people who are religious yet ignorant, is imitation. It insists on and requires imitation. Imitate Buddha! Imitate Christ! Imitate Mahavira! But imitate! Imitate somebody! Don't be yourself! Be somebody else! And we are very stubborn, so you can force yourself to be somebody else. But you will never be somebody else! Please remember! Deep down you cannot be somebody else! You'll remain yourself; but you can force so much onto yourself that you almost start looking like somebody else.

Each man is born with a unique individuality and each man has a destiny of his own. Imitation is a crime. It is criminal. If you try to become a Buddha, you may become an imitation Buddha. You may look like Buddha, you may walk like Buddha, and you may talk like Buddha. But you will miss...you'll miss all that life was ready to deliver to you, because Buddha happens only once. It is not in the nature of things to repeat.

God is so creative that he never repeats anything. You cannot find another human being in the present, in the past or in the future who is going to resemble you exactly. It has never happened. Man is not a mechanism. He is not like a Ford car on an assembly line. You can produce millions alike, exactly alike. Man is a soul. He's an individual. Imitation is poisonous. Never imitate anybody. Otherwise you'll be a victim of your ignorance, which is not religion at all.

Therefore, we can understand that ignorance is the basis in the case of those people who are religious. Maybe ignorance is the cause for their religion. And the effects are, as we have seen, only to cover up that ignorance, which is against the ego.

These are the features of these people. The outstanding characteristics are: they are fanatics, they are stubborn, they are under continuous conditioning and they are people of imitation. Therefore, let us be watchful of this category of people who are religious, while being ignorant.

Sai Ram. Meet again.