

EXPLORING RELIGION AND HAPPINESS: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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For centuries religion has played an interesting role, controversial at times in influencing the lives of people. I am examining whether religion is reduced to behavioral practice only, or is it capable of bringing some meaningful changes in the lives of people? At the micro-level, it has an impact, but at the macro level, is it open to some human intervention or maneuverability? What is the demand for religion from its followers? What is the demand of followers from their religion? Who decides the validity of those standards? How are problems of human dignity, discrimination, and gender bias nurtured in the content of practiced religion? The question of happiness should be connected with religion, but does it have any such connection? Are the psychological patterns of human behavior a ground for prescribing that behavior? The answer to these questions will have a socio-philosophical basis for understanding the status of religion in its present form.

Key Words: Religion, Standards, Human Behavior, Human Dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy must examine religion to reason out a belief system and expose the tendencies of the human mind as discovered through its practice. The case of applied religion is interesting. What is it that makes religion relevant? After all, ethics is affected by religion as well. The religion also gets a reasoned following if it is based on an ethical basis. The co-existence of the two is desirable though not

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necessary. Then comes the task of political theorists to either build or suggest changes in a social-political setup. The role of religion in any society is not hard to gauge. For centuries religion has played an exciting role, controversial at times in influencing the lives of people.

The role of education through religion is significant but is treated casually. The age at which conditioned morality and religion are fused is a tender one. The likelihood of a challenge is little. By the time a young mind can give some of the alternatives to a curious mind, there is an imposition of an authority that is hard to ignore. Authority makes its presence felt right from the inception of the practice, something that is prescribed as a daily practice. Education through tenets of religion can be pervasive. Is this knowledge about personal betterment or a personal God? Is it a way of life or an identity statement that is powerful enough to change the face of the political system as well? What is the essential requirement of religion from the people? Does it cross the line of acceptable behavior? If yes, who should be held responsible for it? All the followers are responsible for it or one authoritative head of a religion? Why is it so that the communication between the religious head and the followers of that religion is markedly impressive for desired results and fails when it comes to establishing harmony or peaceful living? Is there a way to prove that God exists? Is there a way to prove scientifically that God does not exist? If both the proponents are equally placed, should there not be any basic understanding of concepts of peace and coexistence on dignified grounds? If there are and there are aplenty provisions of seeking forgiveness as a virtue and granting forgiveness a more significant virtue, then, why is this value not seen in the followers of any religion where conflict is created in its name? The political takes its energy from the religious sphere to misuse it to its advantage. Coming back to identifying happiness, it is essential to examine the

basic features of happiness and how does happiness become an integral part of the expression of religion.

Happiness is a state of mind on reasoned grounds that becomes a natural choice to make and to which the sentiment or feeling of satisfaction is related if this state of mind exists over some time. This seems to be a good enough description, to begin with. If this definition is kept in mind, does it fit into the requirement, and provisions are given in a religion? The task of philosophy is to raise such searching questions to look for a point wherefrom religion has been politicized for other than spiritual benefits.

The spiritual achievement brings happiness but spiritual and religious may be significantly different. Besides, there may be multitudinous followers of any religion with the freedom to change their religion from time to time. However, the spiritual feat is beyond such manipulation; it is rare to find. Given the principle of consciousness, all human beings can recognize spiritualism, but excellence achieved is directly related to the purity of effort. This is in itself a rarity.

RELIGION AND FOLLOWERS- ITS IMPORTANCE: It is essential to think of how religion could be examined with a tilt towards human virtues. The virtues are not given extraneously; we all know, but to let them remain latent in us is also a religious failure of its kind. What role does religion play in evaluating a wholesome effect in a follower to make others understand its value and impact? The question of identity is easily fulfilled by religion. Nevertheless, the buck does not stop here. The dynamics of religion and language must become a part of religious education. Communication must be directed towards interpreting dialogues and changes to make the context relevant. The fixity of practices that make religion static must

be avoided.

The context of communication should be clarified. The fixation of ideas is not productive, but written ideas lead to possibilities. The possibilities could be for better or worse. The philosophical approach is about explaining the direction of that approach. The social facts need to be examined to understand the socio-philosophical expression of the real world. The expression of religion is social at various levels. The rituals are directed accordingly. How meaningful are the rituals? Do these meanings have a cultural fulfillment, or do they cater to the selfless mental pleasure which religion must address? The philosophical analysis must study the 'religious' and the 'religion' to distinguish. Most religions posit the relation of an individual with a superhuman power that it rests on. Is our happiness generated due to its understanding, or is it an elusive concept? The diligence with which rituals are organized must make their presence comprehensible to the follower. At an individual level, there are many variations in the execution of a ritual and its purpose. Why should there be no responsibility assigned for the knowhow of that action? Why is the belief not examined with the cost at which it is sustained?

Happiness is an abstract idea, but humans do experience it. Just as each divine form is worth, its concept so is each human life following the divine meaning that always eludes it. Religion must take the task of building the bridge between the concept and the realization. It is only then that the meaning of religion in its real sense may be understood. Identifying happiness as a feeling or a response and reflecting on its quality and sustenance facilitate it. The rituals are emphasized so that habits can be formed. Through repeated rituals, an understanding of the divine world emerges, but that does not mean that only those rituals can bring such understanding. If it is becoming more hierarchical, dogmatic then there are philosophical concerns in

accepting it. Life in its dynamic state and mind, in its process of reason, continuously needs to evaluate the synthesis of religion and ritual. Sometimes the social takes over the psychological, and sometimes political seeks to take mileage from it.

Happiness is an overall balance of an attitude that comes out of different expressions of religion. The question of identity and ego are challenging to tide over and equally hard to recognize. In any given situation, the role of religion in dealing with human disposition must be explained. If a religious society fails to give happiness to its followers, it needs to be programmed repeatedly. How is it possible that some creatures and beings appear more valuable than others? Happiness becomes purified with an increased sense of reasoning in it. The selflessness and the significance of being in the present with all possible commitment is the basis of its fecundity. Does not every religion have this notion wrapped in it? How does one unfold the means of identifying such thoughts? The practical world continues to move unexpectedly, and religion is left with the choice of becoming a companion of the masses or the mentor. Becoming a mentor is in dealing with social, historical, and psychological challenges. The illusion of taking the gross and subtle as two different worlds is met with more cynicism as we move on. In the name of keeping the professional and personal separate, we have confused the idea of a man having two worlds –within and without as separate. The truth is that the gross and the subtle are connected. The gross is the means to enrich and understand the subtle. Happiness can never be experienced if the subtle does not affect the experiences of the world without. The individual becomes all-significant in demonstrating a connection between how he feels and how he behaves.

RELIGION AND HAPPINESS: At this juncture, we need to look at the inevitability of happiness in the success of religion. No religion

can last if happiness is not a part of it. The proportion of happiness will only increase with it becoming an integral part of human nature. Happiness is about peace, reason, stable mind, compassion, co-existence, human dignity, and rights. A religion that seeks to start from one end to address these issues of humans is a progressive religion else it needs to be studied. However, do we have access even to say that religion needs to be evolved? Why not? Why is there a scope of not entertaining any critical thinking on issues of religion? The question of power may be involved here to understand the larger issue. The play of ignorance and the desire to rule primarily through the religious platform can be destructive. Philosophy must explain the constituents of religion and show how it is being misappropriated in the interest of a few.

Happiness is not granted by the 'other' in religious outcomes. It cannot be rigged, nor can it be shown in fake numbers. Its presence is felt in the outside world once it is sitting well within an individual. The most downtrodden of any religion must have a course to walk through an understanding of the religion he follows. This involves the necessity of equity-based success in life. The compensatory provisions must keep in mind the eligibility of the recipient. A blanket supposition is often self-defeating. Religion may have some texts to explain its goal, to teach its principles, but all the texts have their contextual validity that must be pronounced. To fit the content of ancient times in the present context should be an exercise that religion must accustom itself to if it wants to remain significant.

Happiness thus is an essential referral in identifying its achievement. The happiness quotient can be nurtured; only if there is a sense of restraint in the individuals. What are the ways of bringing restraint in the followers of a religion? The examination of happiness, its basis, its manifestation will be useful in evaluating a religion. Different

individuals embrace religion at different levels. Their concept of happiness is reflected accordingly. If there is deterioration in the social, psychological, and personal sphere, then ethical degradation is bound to happen. Suppose religion has been a passive witness to such a trend, it needs to be examined. Without comparison or bias, we can begin by examining the happiness content of the followers of a religion, their approach towards the people and the physical world, and their skill at merging the concern of the two. The sense of truth and the recognition of duty are connected.

The larger picture of reaching all with utmost sincerity, looking for the fundamental element of purity in happiness, must become a qualifying feature of any religion. The deflected approach must be highlighted and set aside as soon as it is identified. If we take the example of the *Bhagvata-gita*, it is the victory of the inner self over the mind that assigns the power of becoming an equipoised mind. This equipoised mind teaches us to succeed at *Niskamakarma* or detached action. Both features co-exist. One begins with doing things without expecting fruits of action whereby a state comes when the mind is always in a state of *niskamakarma*. Thus, *Gita* becomes a religion unto itself, a way of life to realize the larger goal of *moksa* or liberation. The concept of happiness is to be identified here; it is pure bliss, happiness cultivated with submission and effort towards achieving a sense of stability in the mind, which becomes a ground of *niskamakarma* and related liberation. The outside world is to be guarded by the principles of the inside world. *Gita* teaches us a way of life. The religion must place before us a way of life that goes from comprehensible to incomprehensible, in this sense, the divine. To understand the value of virtues, to know the foundation of ethics, to realize the importance of human life, to play our part in the larger scheme of things, religion must be a faithful guide, not a dictator.

As we understand happiness, the element of fear should also be examined. Religion should explain the fear generated in the minds of people as a mere political scheme. There can be no understanding of pure love if there is unexplained fear. Any religion presenting myths to sow fear in its followers or to promise them heaven in the after-life only becomes self-defeating on rational grounds. The essence of humans must be sought through religion. Man has to place his goals, priorities the duties the acceptable way. The 'acceptable' has to be following the pursuit of happiness. Communication of religion is as significant as its practice; the lesser the gap between the two, the better it will be. A system works with structures and religion as a system enters every human sphere. The role of religion in different spheres should be laid down along with provisions of dealing with exceptions. Wherever the exception has not been incorporated, a review of basic principles must be done to avoid any logical inconsistency. Happiness cannot be achieved through logic. Neither can it be ensured through logic, but experiential religion on the grounds of integral features encountered at a given time could be a way out.

Just as we have a case for applied ethics, so is the need for applied religion now. Applied religion will address all issues of human concern, and should there be an area that is not answered, and it needs to be propounded. The applicability of the basic principles in dealing with conflict situations or a myth is a mark of mature religion. The violence in religion is in itself defeating. The language of religion should be open to scrutiny. The meaning of words in the present context must be examined. Language takes upon itself the function of reporting the present state of affairs and synergizing the present with the expectation of the past. Differences from the past have to be rationalized before they can be accepted or rejected. The human world is in a constant state of adjustments with the past, present, and

future concerning cultural and social affairs. The higher the element of reason in these two spheres, the more they are likely to produce happiness. The debate may be left open on issues of historicity and its applicability. However, conclusive action may be devised in the present context on the basic foundation of religion from a philosophical point of view—the link between the gross and the subtle play an essential part in choosing the best explanation.

The act of breathing is linked with the mind; till the two do not get connected, there is little to do with religion as the spiritual. The practical approach is very different from the theoretical one. The task of religion is to place the idea of happiness within that of being religious. In the end, religion comes with a different perspective for even a common man to re-evaluate it. The honest approach towards issues of human concern, along with the existence of happiness, is what religion must set as a demand to qualify as relevant religion. Whatever can make happiness grow over the years and justify its presence in human lives could be accommodated in a chapter of religion. The practical approach of bringing changes in the environment around us, along with happiness content in the mind of its follower, will help one to understand a changed meaning of 'good' as well. The simple understanding of religion as merely ritualistic is one reason behind creating a non- efficacious treatment of religion. Virtues, human dignity, rights, duties, responsibility are indirectly taking us towards a way of life that gives happiness, which is a subtle form of satisfaction in our selves. When we look at living religions and their effect on the conflict around us, there is a case of reinventing the role of religion.

The belief, especially religious belief, must be set to reason with some space for building on the unexplained along with spiritual effort. The idea of overlooking the need for the present in

emphasizing the past is not a progressive one. The limits are not easy to decide. Whenever reason takes a backseat, many idiosyncrasies of religion are shaped. No wonder that these idiosyncrasies give a form to religion that is hard to break. The philosophical examination must include the treatment of such behavior. The nature of mind can be formulated with the way thoughts are fed in it, so the importance of rationalizing religion in all its features, the need to train the followers, the change in the patterns of practice are steps towards making religion relevant for social progress.

CONCLUSION

Religion affects a man, so the task of assigning religion a set of responsibilities, and holding it accountable will help. The freedom of religion is there, but the way it imposes its vision on the masses, the way it makes them submit to its expectations is far more complicated. The obsessive element in religion is usually a way of diverting people from real issues. This obsession, when placed alongside the requirement of happiness, makes us understand the contrast between pure happiness that describes the truth of religion and an obsession from which religion has to be released. The journey is subtle; rationality is the ground to stand on. It is a myth to think that religion is so irrational that only unexplained can be its product- 'happiness' in it is rather significant.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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