

God-Realization

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Some time back, I attended a session where an accomplished Vaishnava made a brief presentation on his cult. He wanted to convey that Vaishnavism was the key to the spread of the Bhakti Movement. One gentleman from the audience, who considered himself an intellectual, expressed his reservation about the Bhakti Movement propagated by the Vaishnavas. 'I do not understand the relevance of the Bhakti Movement in our country. Is it able to give relief to the vast majority of ordinary people, perpetually struggling to survive in this world?' he interjected.

While the speaker excused himself for further comments on the subject, one among others whispered: 'It is the realization which drives an individual to conceptualize the Bhakti Movement. It is, no doubt, difficult to perceive the phenomenon.' And then he added further: 'He or she has to visit the religious shrines and interact with the monks there, sink in to the environment, and allow the ambience to generate devotion in him to proceed on the path to realization.'

That triggered many thoughts and ideas in my mind about the basics of Hindu religion.

Dynamics

Realization, I believe, refers to the mechanism of understanding any complex phenomenon through obsessive desire. It calls for application of logic at the initial stage, then follow through by perception and intuition. In the natural process in life, an individual gets involved in activities with

social obligations and professional complexities. A few among many, while on the journey, take to introspection on 'life' as a whole, followed by an effort to self-realization. While on this, the mind is engaged progressively in new thoughts to explore, innovate and then identify the right path. It, being a mental process, has to strike the right chord, invariably in the subconscious; and that keeps on reverberating throughout life's journey. In other words, it offers direction and motivation to accomplish something beyond the realm of the physical world. There is a precondition, though, which inhibits the process. And that is confidence in divinity or subjugation to power at its extreme manifestation. Initially, an individual moves haphazardly like a bee in a glass jar. There will be movement, but without any direction or purpose. But when realization pervades the mind, he discovers the way forward. Hence, realization can be considered as the culmination of cognitive efforts to internalize the phenomenon of divinity in its valid perspectives, facilitating life's movement towards its ultimate goal.

Each stage in life, from birth to death, has definite time frame. Realizing social obligations operates during an individual's formative years; so is the case with professional requirements which cover the subsequent phase of life. Introspection on life's overall journey is spread on a larger continuum, till later part of life. Finally, 'discovering self' is likely to be initiated at the last phase when many of us do rise to certain level of wisdom. Problem arises

when an individual gets mixed up with the phases and indulges in entry and exit without any long-drawn strategy. Consequently, no thought can get polarized to anything tangible, resulting in a perpetually confused state of mind. The gentleman in the gathering, who raised doubt about the propagation of the efficacy of the Bhakti Movement, might be operating from that state.

Process

The question is: How does realization of God perpetuate? Hindu religion does not bind an individual to any regimentation. On the contrary, an aspirant has to decide about his religious pursuits with regard to at what stage of life he wishes to embark on it. He is left to himself to consider his priority for serious involvement in religious practices.

Those, who consider integrating religion with life at any stage, have the options to take either the path of 'rituals' or 'realization'. It is easier to follow the path of rituals where fewer complications are faced; the practices progressively result in build-up of devotion in the devotees. It does not necessarily call for activating the mind through meditation which is rigorous in nature. Nevertheless, meditation is considered to be the desired path to God-realization. Following the path of meditation to get into the religious mould is time-consuming, requiring deep concentration and intellectual backup. When on meditation, an individual is drifted beyond the relevance of time and space, when realization, as a part of the process, takes him to the world of bliss and tranquillity. For a person like me, who has spent many decades in material pursuits, it is extremely difficult to follow such practice and get into that stage within permissible time frame.

After examining various routes to enter the domain of religion at the culmination of

my professional pursuits, I decided to get initiated by my Guru to take the right path. He, being a wise man, formulated the strategy for me. And that was to chant a particular set of words associated with my *Ishta Devatā*. I must add that with the chanting during *japa* over a period of many years, I have the unique experience from time to time to get into that stage of enjoying an inner joy. Such moments were, no doubt, transitory in nature, but none the less served the great purpose of generating confidence in the process.

Hindu religion, like any other cult, prescribes a way out from any difficulty for the devotees, after taking into account their social obligations, intellectual capacity and, probably, motivational complexities. The common masses have the option to choose the simplistic path of rituals in Hindu religion to feel closeness to the Almighty. The process is aided by gradual generation of devotion and faith in the worshippers.

Hindu religion stipulates that it is the 'faith' in the Almighty which drives one and all in the community to seek solace from worries and anxieties in life. In their mental world they feel relieved after leaving their concerns of life at the feet of their cherished deities so that they can carry on with their worldly pursuits with new vigour and enthusiasm. Temples, shrines and ashramas become the resorts of devotees who, otherwise, are not capable of tackling life's umpteen complications.

I remember the old domestic help in Varanasi who visits Viswanath temple during very early hours of morning on auspicious occasions so that she can carry on with her day-to-day activities to earn livelihood during rest of the day with required energy level. It is the faith which drives her to such rigours without any complaint and remorse. In such situations, I think faith turns into 'realization' on a different scale.

Power of japa

The path, Hindu religion prescribes, has basically two streams, ie plunging in meditation or engaging in rituals. Japa, on the other hand, is something in between, where regimentation of mind results in gradual transcendence to the mode of meditation. Having been absorbed in the practice for more than two decades, as advised by my swamiji, I am happy to explore the path to experience the influence of religion in my life.

Japa dictates chanting of a brief ‘mantra’ selected by the Guru. The process is rigorous to start with; follow through is by faith and concentration. The gradual outcome takes the following route of realization:

- Guru is the embodiment of the Almighty.
- Surrendering to ‘Guru’ is the ultimate act in life.
- While on japa, layers of concentration build up progressively.
- Mind is on alert with positive thoughts.
- When concentration peaks, there are *sāttvika* vibrations all over the body.
- It gives a relaxed feeling and something to look forward on day-to-day basis.
- Physical discomfort, experienced at the initial stage, gives in to inner joy.
- Worldly needs get minimized, socialization needs are confined to spiritual pursuits and mind gets into different stages of activation.
- Practising japa is experiential learning with regard to reaching life’s ultimate destination.
- Prolonged practice captivates the mind leading to the exploration of the self.

Analysis

All modes of God-realization should

begin at the right juncture, pursued on an indefinite time frame on the foundation of ‘faith’. Our scriptures specify four stages in human life with distinct differences based on needs and drives:

- First stage: *Brahmacharya*, ie bachelor studentship lasting through about 25 years since birth.
- Second stage: *Gārhasṭha*, ie the life as a householder lasting through about 50 years after the first stage.
- Third stage: *Vānaprastha*, ie transferring household responsibilities to the next generation, getting into hermit-like lifestyle with emphasis on social services and spiritual pursuits. It is the stage of detachment and gradual seclusion.
- Fourth stage: *Sannyāsa*, ie complete renunciation and dedication to religious pursuits.

These four phases in life’s journey, when adhered to, offer the opportunity to think ahead for useful engagement in life.

I read somewhere when the spiritual leader summarized his life’s preaching as ‘Be God yourself if you wish to realize God’. It speaks volumes. In common man’s interpretation it can be re-phrased as ‘Acquire godly qualities before you can realize God’.

As per our religious scriptures, we have a part of God within ourselves. It is defined as Ātman. He is our conscience keeper in life. He is always there to guide us on the right path, provided we take cognizance of Him. God-realization emanates from the conscience keeper. Even if we forget to feel His existence within us, we have the opportunity to be aware of Him in our next life as per Hindu religion. If one indulges in good work, he goes closer to his ‘inner God’ and can look for a better life to practise religion in real earnestness. ■

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