Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

Defining ‘Universal Religion’

Religion is the faith by which man lives. It reflects his inward vision of the light that can descend upon him. Universal religion is constructing one's faith and vision upon man’s true identity as man or to present a true human identity regardless of colour, caste, nationality, creeds etc. It is apart from political barriers and cuts across the racial, national, geographical boundaries. It is based upon such higher values as truth, beauty, justice, love, peace, progress etc. It gives attention to the basic spiritual identity of man. It provides common platform to all religious faiths. Different religions get together with the spirit of co-operation.

In his celebrated work The Essential Unity of All Religions, Bhagvan Das has defined Universal Religion as that religion “in which there may be Universal Agreement”.

But the question is how can we find the element of agreement when there is so much difference among religions?

The answer to this question is that in religion we must make the effort to determine what is the most certain and good and what may be most approved and agreed in any circumstance by all humanity. Religion should promote good will, sympathy and brotherhood among all human beings. This is the only way to repress conflict, prejudice, misconception, disagreement and narrow minded zeal.
According to Bhagvan Das, the new declaration of Universal Religion must be based on the principle of majority rule. This means there should be first of all an agreement between the great religions that all of them teach the same truth.

"Those truths and practices which receive not only the greatest number of, but unanimous, votes from the living religions, those beliefs and observances on which all are agreed should obviously be regarded as constituting Universal Religion".2

This kind of religious universalism is not a new idea but is already present in many ancient texts. The Upanishads, for example, say:

"Cows are of many different colours, but
The milk of all is of one colour, white;
So the proclaimers who proclaim the Truth
Use many varying forms to put it in,
But yet the Truth enclosed in all is One".3

This sentiment is echoed in Rumi in the following verse:

"Jesus put many cloths of many hues
Into one jar, and out of it they came
With all their hues washed off, all clean and white,
As seven-coloured rays merge in white light".4

Krishna, too, says in Gita and not once but twice:

"To but One Goal are marching everywhere,
All human beings, though they may seem to walk
On paths divergent; and that Goal is I,
The Universal Self, Self-Consciousness".5

Krishna says that the teaching he is giving to Arjuna was given by Vivasvan to Manu, by Manu to Ikshvaku, and then by many Rshis, age after age. All is always present in the Memory of God, the Omniscient,
Omnipotent, Omnipresent Universal Self, the One principle of all Life and Consciousness.

Similarly, in Islam Muhammad (the Paigham-bar, the Rasul, i.e., the ‘message-bearer’, sent by the Spirit) says:

“This that I am now uttering unto you,
The Holy Qur’an – it is to be found
Within the ancient Seers’ writings too;
For Teachers have been sent to every race.
Of human beings no community
Is left without a warner and a guide.
And aught of difference we do not make –
For disagreement there is none ‘twixt them –
Between these Prophets. All that have been sent,
Have been so sent but One Truth to proclaim –
I, verify the I Al(l) One, am God,
There is no other God than, I [the Self,
The Universal all-pervading Self],
And I alone should be adored by all”.

The Qur’an makes this further clear in the following verse:

“Teachers are sent to each race that they may
Teach it in its own tongue, so there may be
No doubt as to meaning in its mind.
An Arabic Qur’an is thus revealed,
That Mecca and the cities round may learn
With ease the Truth put in the words they know.
For had we made them in a foreign tongue
They surely would have made objection thus –
“Why have not these revealings been made clear?”

The obvious significance of these remarkable texts is that the essentials are common to all religions: that Truth is universal and not the monopoly of any race or teacher; that non-essentials vary with time, place, and circumstance; that the same fundamental truths have been revealed by God in different scriptures, in different languages, through different persons born in different nations.
The Prophet of Islam adds the positive counsel:

“Let all of us ascend towards and meet together on the common ground of those high truths and principles which we all hold”.^8

“Verily, all who faithfully believe in God, and Day of Judgement, and do good, whoever they be, Jews, Christians, Sabians, they shall have their reward from the Lord God. There is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve”."9

“Cling, all, to the strong rope of Love Divine
Love for each other, and of the One God
And do not think of separation ever”.^10

The word ‘religion’ which is derived from Latin *religare* means ‘to bind back’. It means that bonds of love and sympathy should bind human beings with each other and with God. According to Bhagwan Das, it means

“The power to bind together the hearts of men to one another, by the common bond of God, the All-pervading Self. It is the power to give birth to, and to nourish and maintain, a high civilization. It is noteworthy that every historic civilization has had, and has today, its specific religion, its worshipped ideal. Indeed the birth of a new religion, i.e., a fresh revival of the spirit of religion, whence united co-operation has invariably proceeded and given again birth to a new civilization”.^11

In same manner, the Vedic word ‘Dharma’ is from the root *Dhr* which means ‘hold and bind together’. It also has same significance.

“The ‘holding together’ of human being in a ‘society’ is not possible without perpetual ‘give and-take’, ‘right-and-duty’, incessant little or great acts of self-sacrifice, yajana, qurbani. The self-assertion of any one individual is not possible without corresponding self-denial on the part of some other or others”.^12
There are three main aspects in all religions. In the Vaidika Dharma they are expressly mentioned as Janana-marga, Bhakti-marga and the Karma marga. In Islam it is called Haqiqat, Tariqat and Shariyat. Buddhist, Jaina and Christian theology also have words with same significance. In the words of same author,

"We may distinguish three main parts or aspects in all the great religions. In the Vaidika Dharma they are expressly mentioned: the Jnana-Marga, the Bhakti-marga, the Karma-marga. Generally corresponding to these are, the Haqiqat or Aqayad, the Tariqat or Ibadat, and the Shariyat or Ma'milat of Islam. Gnosis, Pietas, and Energeia; the (a) Way of Knowledge, Illumination, Gnosticism, (b) the Way of Devotion, Pietism, Mysticism, (c) the Way of Rites and Ceremonies and Works of self-denying Charity. Activism, Energism, Practicalism – these seem to be similarly distinguished in Christian theology, and to have the same significance. In the Buddhist Eightfold Path, the three most important rules under which the other five may be classified, are Right Knowledge, Right Desire and Right Action – Samyakdrshti, Samyak sankalpa and Samyak vyayama; which are the same things as the three Vaidika Margas. The Jaina teaching is the same".13

Universal religion laid stress upon the essential unity of all the great religions of the world. It teaches respect for all. It teaches that different spiritual paths lead to the same goal. The growth of human personality and the growth of human society depend upon the higher values.

Universal religion does not teach man’s isolation from the society or the annihilation of the individual in the depth of the universal. The universal is unproductive without the individual. The individual can discover its true center of gravity only in the heart of universal. The boundless creativity of the universal can find its expression only in and through the individual.
Universal religion therefore helps the individual rise from its ego shell of dogmatism, casteism, and cultural differences.

Universal religion helps man to discover wide open world every part of which creates unique relationship to the infinite.

"The more the individual becomes his own true self, the more he gains the ability to fruitfully assimilate the limitless riches of the universe. And the more he broadens out to embrace the vastness of the universe, the richer and profounder his individuality".⁴⁴

Universal religion embraces the progress of the man. It helps individual to know his own self. It also helps those individuals who seek complete self-destruction in the eternal.

That is why Universal religion enables the individual to make the transition from the ego-centric to the genuinely cosmos centric outlook. Aware of his rootedness in the eternal, he firmly dedicates himself to cosmic welfare. Alive to the creative urges of his own being, he freely fulfills the creative urges of his own being, he freely functions as a creative center of the Supreme Being.

**Ten Imperatives of Universal Religion**

The essence of universal religion can be summarized in the form of ten imperatives. These are the ten commandments of higher spiritual fulfillment of the individual.

These ten imperatives derive from the most basic structure of life. Because the central truth about life is that the individual is an integral part of the whole world. The fundamental truth about life is "Be true to yourself as an integral part of the cosmic whole".⁴⁵
Ist Imperative: Oneness of God: The first imperative of universal religion is the concept of the oneness of God. It is to take God as a common basis for unity. God is the unifying principle of all living religions of the world. The One Supreme Being is the substructure of all religions. God is common source of inspiration.

“Truth is Being as unveiled, as revealed to human consciousness. It is ultimate reality insofar as it is known and comprehended by the human mind. But since Being is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted, truth may be described as one infinite light that shines in various forms and colours”.

Different conceptions of God found in different religions are the different forms of expression of the same Supreme Being. They are appropriate in different circumstances, and useful for all human societies at different stages of evolution.

All religions of the world are like different ways leading to the same goal. They are like different boats carrying human beings across the river of life. An enlightened person keeps away with all sectarian quarrels, conflicts, prejudices and conceptual disputes. He emphasizes the universal spiritual values of existence. He should concentrate upon basic spiritual doctrines common to the all living religions of the world.

“Among such common and essential principles are: devotion to truth, spirit of love and compassion, commitment to justice, concerted action for a noble cause, aspiration for liberation and immortality, etc. But the most important thing in religion is to apply such principles in daily living with a view to the futilization of the infinite in one’s life”.

We can say that God is the centre point of man’s religious emotions. God is defined as that which is capable to satisfy the hunger of all souls.
God is One Supreme Being that serves as the light, life and love. God is one and same for whole humanity. But it is true that each religion emerged in different circumstances and different socio-cultural backgrounds. Different peoples express their religion in different theological terms and because of this they represent different aspects of the same reality.

For instance, in Judaism the Supreme was revealed as Jehovah; in Zoroastrianism as Ahura Mazda; in Christianity as the Heavenly Father; in Islam as Allah; in Hinduism as Iswara; in Buddhism as Sunyata; in Taoism as Tao. “There is one Being that sages call by different names". Jehovah, Ahura, Mazda, Heavenly, Father, Iswara, Sunyata, Allah etc. are different names given to the same ocean of creative energy. Different names are a matter of different languages, used by different people but the eternal essence are same that is one supreme Being or God.

IInd Imperative : Equality of Prophets : The second imperative of world religion is the concept of equality of all prophets. The founders of the world’s religions are all divine personalities. God sent those divine persons for the welfare of the whole mankind. They fulfill the purpose in the province of man’s religious evolution.

“Whenever there is a crisis in history, an eclipse of higher values, an upsurge of the forces of ignorance and evil, the evolutionary world spirit is manifested in finite form for the good of humanity. In different countries and in different ages, in response to the crises of faith in human life, the divine will, i.e., the cosmic plan of the evolutionary world spirit, or its will-to-manifest, is revealed to suitable individuals in order to subdue the forces of darkness and discord and to ensure the reign of love, truth and righteousness”.
The founders of great religions like Buddha, Moses, Krishna, Christ, Mohammed etc. have equally enlightened the world. Each one has importance in respect to his own specific spiritual mission. If we said that one is superior to another it will be unwise and unjust with them. The aim of prophets was unity of mankind rather than creating discord amongst people. It is only because of ignorance that people divide one from the other prophet.

Maulana Azad says that Qur'an is the message of God to prophets who came time to time and taught the mankind right path. So no one is superior over others.

“It is unworthy of modern man to allow his religious devotion to degenerate into emotional fixation upon any particular religious leader. Devotion to a particular prophet becomes self-defeating, if it fails to blossom into a realization of the Supreme and appreciation of the universal truth”.

All prophets become prophets by virtue of their elevation of the universal truth above their individuality. That is why, their historic importance lies in the fact that they served as symbols of the Supreme. But whereas the Supreme is one without a second, symbols are by their very nature many without number. Whereas the supreme is absolute, symbols, in order to be effective, are necessarily relative. Whereas the Supreme is complete and perfect, symbols by reason of being relative, cannot help being incomplete and imperfect. So religious devotion withers on the wayside when it fails to reach out beyond the symbol to the supreme reality.
It is the sign of religious immaturity of people to say: “our master uttered the last word of truth. His teaching is absolute and final” or to say: “Our Messiah alone is the Son of God. Other religious leaders are at best perfect men or illumined teachers”. Or to say: “Our Prophet is the last and therefore the most perfect of all messengers of God”. Or to say: “Our Saviour is the complete incarnation of God, other Saviours being only incomplete incarnations”.\(^{21}\)

The basic task of world religion is to expand man’s mental horizon and to lift man out of the marshes of sectarianism. No dogmatism stands in the way of the man as he begins to have a sense of participation in the world civilization.

**IIIrd Imperative : Love of Humanity :** The third imperative is the concept of universal love and compassion. It depends upon the assertion that God inhabits in the heart of all men without distinction of class, colour, creed and race and nationality.

“Love of man is a spontaneous outflow from the vision of the Supreme. The Supreme is the One and dwells in all. To know the Supreme is to perceive the spiritual unity of all mankind and of all existence. It involves the understanding that all creatures live, move and have their being in the creative medium of the one. Humanity is indeed indivisible. The world cannot live half free and half slave. Nor can it live half full and half starved. Nor it can live half in peace and half in war. Different segments of humanity are inseparably interconnected and interdependent. The deeper one’s spiritual insight, the broader one’s human sympathies and compassionate regard for fellow beings. Spiritual understanding kindles the flame of compassion in the heart and clears away the blinding mists of ignorance, selfishness and greed”.\(^{22}\)
The Supreme is inhabited equally in all human beings because God is basically partless and indivisible. Just as the moon is reflected in different waves, the entire universe is present in all human beings in its undivided essence. Every human being has essential value and purity of his own - that is to develop his potential and make its own contribution to civilization.

"The equality of all men is a logical sequel to the equal presence of the One in all. But that does not imply a denial of the important differences of equality and capability characteristic of different individuals and peoples. While some individuals show early signs of extraordinary genius, some are born idiots or morons while some are saintly or godlike, some are hardened criminals." 23

The doctrine of human equality implies that each individual has an essential value and dignity of his own. Each one has a right to live and fulfill the best within him. All people should be given equal chance for the fulfillment of their basic potentiality. Every individual is indeed great in his own position.

So the relation between the love of man and the love of Supreme is one of mutuality. The vision of Supreme opens the gates of pure universal love. On the other hand, the practice of universal love and service of man leads to the realization of the Supreme.

"Wisdom gives breadth to love; love gives depth to wisdom. Wisdom serenizes love; love expresses wisdom". 24

The spirit of universal love flows from the vision of Supreme. This vision of Supreme is not confined in the limits of the caste, creed, nation, culture and human species. It embraces the entire living creation.
“Illuminated by the vision of the One, it perceives the sacredness of all life. It is moved by the suffering of all, and seeks to share with all the blessings of life. It has been rightly said that the wise man feels himself within the heart of all living creatures, and feels their joys and sorrows within his own heart. It is such experience of boundless love which lays the foundation for cosmic ethics”.

IVth Imperative: The Spirit of Toleration: The fourth imperative is the conception of toleration as a spiritual attitude.

“In the spiritual sense toleration is an act of love and understanding. If we love our fellow beings, we are naturally interested in listening to what they have to say. Interested to understand their ways of thinking and believing and acting. Love opens the door to the appreciation of opposite viewpoints. It pulls down the barriers that block communication. It forbids the arrogance of cocksure convictions and foregone conclusions. It prohibits the cruelty of hurting the feelings of other people in the name of preconceived truth”.

Toleration is a positive attitude of the mind. For example, somebody says, “God exists”. It means a man trying to express his deep conviction that such higher values as truth, beauty, justice, love etc. are grounded in reality and ultimately prevail in life. But his opponent says, “God does not exist”. He is rejecting the anthropomorphic notion of God. Now the question arises: how can a religious person love a man who outrightly denies God? How can a theist tolerate an atheist?

It is by virtue of openmindedness, openheartedness of love that we can understand other people. It is through sympathetic feeling or understanding that we can help them.
An ancient story has it that one dark cold winter night a devout person, cozily seated by the fireside in his little cottage, was saying prayers and singing the praise of the Lord. Outside, a savage storm was lashing the areas with great fury. A stranger, caught in the storm and afflicted with cold and hunger, sought refuge in that cottage. On hearing the knock at the door, the holy man said, “Come in and join me in singing the glory of God”. The stranger thanked the holy man for his kind hospitality, but added that he could not join him in prayers because he did not believe in God. Shocked at the shameless confession of disbelief, the holy man drove out the stranger with the remark that there was no room for an atheist in the house of God. About half an hour later, an angel entered the house and inquired whether the holy man had seen a stranger lost in the stormy night and seeking food and shelter. The holy man said that just a while ago he had turned away a man who was about 50 years old but who was a disbeliever in God.

The angel inquired, “Do you think that God knows that man as an atheist?” The devotee said, “Oh yes, God must know that, because He is certainly omniscient”. The angel said, “In that case, is not your faith only lip-deep? If God could tolerate the existence of that man for fifty years, how come you could not tolerate him in his utter distress for one single night?” Speaking thus the angel disappeared. A black curtain fell upon the much vaunted holiness of the holy man.

Vth Imperative : Self-Understanding : The fifth imperative is based upon the basic spiritual need for self-understanding. It is about the fact that self is the key to understand the mystery of ultimate reality.
As Socrates said, “know thyself”. Or, as the ancient sages of India said, “Realize your own inmost self”. Jesus, too, says: “what shall it avail ye if thou gaineth the whole world but loseth thine own soul?”.\(^{28}\)

According to Nietzsche, “Follow not me but your self”. The great scientist Einstein similarly says, “Be true to yourself”.

A person cannot attain happiness if he cannot make others happy. Whenever one understands his own self, he attains salvation. True salvation lies in the state of productive self-existence.

Ontologically, one’s own self is the key to know the essential structure of the universe in which we live. Our mind is like a mirror capable of reflecting the whole world. When a person is good the world looks good to him. When he is happy, the world seems happy. On the other hand, if a person is evil-minded the world looks like a hell.

“The authentic self is the self of balance and harmony. It is the ultimate unifying principle of existence. It is that inmost center of our being which is unaffected by emotional fluctuations and one-sided thought movements. The pure light of consciousness shines there. When by means of psychic integration, the inmost self-center is discovered - when the mind is purged of all negative thoughts and emotions as well as of blind and selfish desires – the world appears in right perspective. One begins to see things as they are in their true proportions. One becomes aware of one’s inter-relatedness with fellow beings in common belonging to the cosmic whole. One comes alive to one’s true status and function in the total scheme of existence”.\(^{29}\)

Spiritually, the self is one’s only point of immediate contact with the Supreme Being. The self is related to the Supreme as spark of fire is
related to the flame. When a person becomes aware of his own self he directly realizes supreme Being within himself.

"The Supreme Being as the boundless space of consciousness, i.e. the all-embracing medium of cosmic consciousness, is not to be constructed in terms of either thought, or reason, or will, or love, or impulse. It is the matrix of all mental functions known to us. It is the creative unity of thought, emotions and will. It is the comprehensive unity of wisdom, love, power and peace."36

VIth Imperative: Middle Path: The sixth imperative is based upon the concept of middle path. It holds that the path of truth is the path of harmony and balance. The world is the stage for ever-new creation. It spreads the festival of light and colour, of sound and vision, in which life invites living creatures to participate. The self is the unifying center of all life experience. It carries the creative movement of life to higher level of consciousness.

In order to perform this creative function it is desirable for the individual to aim at the wholeness of being. He must follow the middle path between asceticism and epicureanism. Human personality is an indivisible whole of reason and passion, of flesh and spirit, of body and soul, of the conscious and the unconscious. The deepest springs of creativity can be released by properly harmonizing these two inseparable aspects of personality. Only the person made whole can become holy in the true sense of the term. The full growth of personality breaks through to a new emergent value on the basis of inner harmony and wholeness. The individual self is united with the Supreme. It is reborn on the cosmic planes of consciousness.
VIIth Imperative : Love of Nature : The seventh imperative is based upon the concept of nature as the nursing mother spirit. It holds that it is by intelligently following the guidance of nature that the height of spiritual glory can be achieved.

From the beginning of civilization love of nature has been a source of creative inspiration to poets, painters, mystics, sages and philosophers. Nature is indeed the visible language of God. It is a gift of God for mankind. When man approaches nature with an open mind, shaking loose from the pressures of social existence, he is likely to catch a glimpse of the glory that is eternal. Mother nature gets a chance to speak to the soul of man. To disclose a little of the tremendous mystery of Being, nature has her own way of opening the new doors of perception. Sometime with a sudden stroke she sharply pierces the veil of ignorance. Like a flash of lightning she illumines the path. She speaks through the grandeur of her laws. She speaks through the rustling of leaves in the forest, the chirping of birds, the leaping of frogs, and the dancing of peacocks.

Close contact with nature in her silent chambers is always revitalizing. It recharges the batteries of life. It restores strength to the weak, health to the sick, wholeness to the broken mind, and serenity to the soul. No synthetic products of human ingenuity – no pills and drugs – can serve as a substitute for the healing power that belongs to nature.

There is profound wisdom in nature. Creative intelligence is immanent in her operations. Deep down in the soul of nature there is an urge to create endless variety, ever-new form and quality; an urge to bring
forth into manifestation ever-new patterns and designs. Nature in her essence is the cosmic creative artist. She is bent upon manifesting ever-new values in the domain of space and time. If by God we mean the timeless Being (Siva) nature is the creative dynamism of Being (Sakti).

But nature exists not only outside of us. She dwells also inside us. By virtue of this presence, our body has a profound wisdom of its own. It has unsuspected healing powers. It is self-directing, self-adjusting, self-regulating. It has a unique rhythm of self-development of its own. That is why in order to realize God, an individual has to be initiated into the mysteries of his own nature.

Nature is like mother to her child. With her protective love she holds the child close to her bosom. But in due time she makes the sacrifice and allows the grown up child to stand on his and own in physical separation from the mother. In the same way, nature secretly guides the course of development of the individual by the force of physical instincts, and the drives of the unconscious psyche. He later discovers freedom. He discovers also a whole new world of higher values. It is nature that has been patiently preparing him for this new discovery. Those who rebel against nature prematurely in the name of spirit, make a long detour and suffer much.

There is a famous saying in India that in order to enter the kingdom of spirit, one has to obtain a passport from nature. There is no antagonism between nature and spirit. The duality of instinct and reason, of flesh and soul, falls within the dialectical growth engineered by nature herself as the evolutionary impetus of spirit.
VIIIth Imperative: The Omnipresence of Truth

The eighth imperative is based upon the concept of the omnipresence of truth. It holds that a world-wide openmindedness is the basic condition of spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth makes an individual a citizen of the world. It develops world orientation. Spirituality generates in him the urge to recognize truth. Truth is like the sun which shines equally upon all, upon entire world. Like sun, truth is also hidden in the mythologies and religion of all countries of the world. The understanding of truth can open gates of spiritual insight.

No particular religious system has a monopoly upon God. No particular philosophical school can be taken as the last world of wisdom. No particular culture can be said to have monopoly upon God. Those who try to prescribe fixed value system or thought commit spiritual murder.

It is the great privilege of man to be able to draw freely from the vast cultural heritage of the human race and to follow world’s masterminds including the founders of all different religions. The religion of modernism consists in developing the spirit of world citizenship. The light of truth is streaming in from all sides of the universe. It is creative assimilation of worldwide human heritage.

The different religious principles and dogmas acknowledge their limitation in expressing the fullness of spiritual truth. A spiritual instructor must be broadminded and place the welfare of all human beings above their creeds. Their fundamental concern should be to help them to choose
elements of nourishment from different dogmas and creeds. It should help individuals to grow in conformity with suitable creed and then grow further. It is their search for truth beyond all creeds.

World orientation is a vital principle of creative spiritual growth. It is the principle of gathering chosen element of spiritual nourishment from all cultural sources. It develops the multiplicity into all living unity. The doctrine of unity is supplied not by any fixed dogma or creed but the evolving spirit in man.

**IXth Imperative : Devotion to Higher Values :** The ninth imperative is based upon the concept of high values. It upholds the idea that the meaning of life lies in the realization of higher values.

The endeavour to attain values adds new dimension to man’s life. The struggle to the pursuit of higher values gives meaning to his existence. Without this urge, the life leads to an endless path of darkness and worthlessness. Gloom and despair surrounds his consciousness. But as man embodies value, life gains importance and meaning. He enters a new horizon of happiness and prosperity.

Now the question arises what makes life meaningful? Every man cherishes the value of happiness. He feels joyful on the fulfillment of his healthy desires. He also treasures values such as love, honour, power and important position in society. Freedom, equality and justice appeal him. He longs for unity, peace and progress. He engages himself in the pursuits of scientific exploration, artistic creation, philosophical contemplation and other such cultural values.
The multiplicity of higher values is attained only with the affirmation of Being. In attaining awareness of Being, man experiences oneness of all existence. His experience of the Being springs out love and wisdom from his consciousness, which is the matrix of all higher values.

Every great religion of the world is the outcome of truth-vision of some great individuals who made a direct relation with the Being. True mysticism embodies such direct vision. Direct contact with the eternal evokes great wisdom and compassion. It enables new values to appear on the mental horizon.

Universal religion believes that every man can establish a direct contact with the eternal by virtue of the creative spark within him. After all, the eternal is the ultimate ground of his existence.

There is a mutual relation between a man's sense of value and his experience of Being. The more a person embodies the sense of value the closer he gets to the Being. It intensifies his experiences with the God. He takes a deeper insight into the timeless dimension of existence. On the other hand, when man gets close to the Divine he experiences such great sense as love, joy and beauty, his mental horizon widens and the world seems new and reborn. He seems to be equipped for a sacred mission. He experiences a radical change in his sense of value.

Xth Imperative: Evolutionary Participation: The tenth imperative is about the idea of evolutionary participation. It rests upon belief that the world is a real and meaningful outcome of the creative urge that flows from deep beneath.
Universal religion upholds the trueness of the universe in which we live. The world is not an unreal dream, nor a futile nothing. The Being has also bestowed it with all-creative agility. And as the Being is much diversified, it is also eternally important.

Universal religion thus embodies a true and dynamic outlook towards the world. It fills the world-spirit with a view to conquer new frontiers in knowledge, love and progress.

In medieval times, man's encounter with the Divine reduced religion merely to the questions of hereafter, the heaven and the hell, angels and demons, etc. Man pursued the ultimate goal either as continued personal existence in the sphere of the supernatural or as the exotic enjoyment in the supra-cosmic silence. The encounter of man with the Divine was a significant point in the spiritual evolution of mankind. It pulled the man out of the bondages of worldly matrix and filled in him the active awareness of the values of eternity. It gave him the essential identity of the ontological sense of the Being.

Man's disattachment with worldly bliss inclined him to the view that the world is either evil or unreal. He invented the idea that monastic life is the best and surest way to salvation. The materialistic values gave way to the values of poverty, chastity and obedience in the West and of desirelessness, ascetic renunciation and static contemplation in the East.

But the complete alignment with the eternal is a dynamic and creative experience. It reveals that life is neither unreal nor mirage, but a tremendously true and important mode of the realization of the Divine. The world is not a misconceptive image that man has evolved of his emotional
needs. World is indeed a great festival of light and joy, love and beauty where every creature has a particular role to complete the meaningful expression of the divine. To reject this glory of participation is an act of ignorance to the glory of life.

This complete union with the divine fills man with the timeless essence of eternity. He triumphs over the confinement of the perishable body and marches towards the imperishable cradle of spirit.

Complete union with the Being evolves a feeling of love and oneness among the living creatures. It produces the spirit of universal love and compassion. This feeling is not the outcome of the inner need for penance and punishment but is the free sense of responsibility flowing from love and from the affirmation of self in all (sarvatma-bhava).

Another aspect of complete union with the Divine worth mentioning here is the evolutionary aspect of the Being. The world is not merely real but a meaningful plan of evolution. The unique qualities and unprecedented values flow from the endless depths of the Being, which bring constant changes and abrupt mutation.

This creative process of evolution gives us a glimpse into the creative energy of the Divine which sustains the world. The intricacy of involution in evolution, with respect to the inexhaustible bind of eternal in time and infinite in space, gives a new dimension to importance of the process of evolution.

The true union with the Being lies not only in its timeless essence but also in its evolutionary process. It is thus of great importance to understand this dynamic ingredient of spiritual experience. The Divine lies
not merely in the eternal but in the everlasting evolutionary process. So the integral union with the eternal would necessarily involve mutual co-existence of conscious co-operation with the evolutionary process.

Now to sum up everything, the spiritual union with the Divine implies three essential factors. First, it liberates man from ignorance and futile bondages of the world and partakes the life eternal of the Being. Secondly, it brings from within the man the spirit of universal love and a sense of responsibility for all creatures of the world. Thirdly, it fills man with the intrinsic value of evolutionary process and his active participation in this process.

**Ramananda and Kabir**

After dealing extensively with the idea of universal religion, we discuss here below the views of some of its most important exponents in the medieval India. It would be appropriate to start this historical discussion with Ramnanda who was the bridge between the Bhakti movements of the south and the north. He taught the doctrine of Bhakti to all the four castes without bias. He admitted disciples from all castes and from both sexes, even from Musalamans.

Ramananda’s teachings gave rise to two schools of religious thought. One conservative and the other radical. Among his famous disciples was Kabir about whom the famous historian Tarachand says:

“They say Kabir is a genius of a different order. He has gazed into the mystery of life and seen the vision of the ineffable light. He brings from the world of beyond a new message for the individual and for society. He dreams of a future purified of insincerities, untruths, uglinesses,
inequalities; he preaches a religion based on the only foundation on which faith can stand, namely, personal experience. He brushes aside unhesitatingly the whole paraphernalia of dogma and authority, for his soul is sick of the sorry spectacle of the quarrels of creeds and the worship of empty shells of the formal religions. He tolerates no shams and demands reality in the search after God".  

Kabir compares the relation of man with God as the relation of sea-waves with sea itself. He uses the same example to present the relation between oneness of universe and the Absolute.

“As ice is made from water, and as ice will become water and vapour, so is the reality from that, and therefore this and that are the same”.

God is the central theme of Kabir’s thoughts whom he calls by many names such as Rama, Hari, Brahma, Satpurusa, Bechun, Allah, Khuda.

According to him, God is transcendent and immanent, impersonal and personal, infinite and finite, without qualities and qualified, the non-being and the being, the conscious and the unconscious, neither manifest nor hidden, neither one nor two, both within and without. According to Kabir,

“Oh, how may I ever express that secret word? Oh, how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?..... There are no words to tell that which He is”.

He says it is insufficient for ordinary humans to hold the entire view of total reality. When a man expanded his consciousness, he can see the Lord in me and in you.

“His vision of dynamic reality is vouchsafed to few, it is impossible to see it by the light of ordinary reason for the analytical intellect is the cause of separation, and “the house of reason is very far away”
This is the reason why Kabir speaks God as transcendent.

“The Absolute (Para Brahman), the Supreme Soul (Purusa) dwells beyond the beyond”, or as pure Essence (Pak Dhat), at other times as identical with all beings.35

Further,

“He himself is the true, the seed and the germ. He himself is the flower, the fruit and shade. He Himself is Brahma, creature and Maya”.36

Following Qur’an Kabir holds that the nature and the essence of God is light.

“See the ocean filling One Light (nur) which spreads in the whole creation”, and, “Thy light (nur) fills all”, and “the Light is covering, the light is the seat, the Light is pillow”.37

Kabir is a mighty wamer, path maker, the great admirer of the unity of Hindu and Muslim communities of India. He taught that “the divine disclosed itself in the human race as a whole”.38

The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which unites all people. He rejects those features of Hinduism and Islam which are against this true spirit. He rejected those religions which gave no importance to the real spiritual welfare of the mankind. He selected from both religions their common elements, and the similarities between them.

“The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which would unite all castes and creeds. He rejected those features of Hinduism and Islam, which were against this spirit, and which were of no importance for the real spiritual welfare of the individual. He selected from both religions their common elements, and the similarities between them”.39

“The Hindu resorts to the temple and the Musalman to the mosque, but Kabir goes to the place where both are
known. The two religions (din) are like two branches in the middle of which there is a sprout surpassing them. Kabir has taken the higher path abandoning the custom of two. If you say that I am a Hindu then it is not true, nor am I a Musalman; I am a body made of five elements where the unknown (ghaibi) plays. Mecca has verily become Kasi, and Rama has become Rahim”. 40

Kabir says that Musalman and Hindu are like two branches of one and same tree.

Further he says that “I am not the follower of law (dharma) nor am I without law; I am not an ascetic nor devotee of desire. I am not a speaker nor a listener, I am not a servant nor a master. I am not bound nor am I free, nor am I engaged in worldly pursuits. I never parted from any nor am I a companion of any. I do not go to hell nor do I proceed to heaven. I am the doer of all actions, yet I am different from them”. 41

He says that the Hindus should give up their ceremonial, sacrifice, idol worship, caste difference. According to Kabir,

“The Hindus should give up what every reformer since the days of Buddha had insisted upon ... ceremonial, sacrifice, lust for magical powers, lip worship, repetition of formulae, pilgrimages, fasts, worship of idols, gods and goddesses, Brahmin supremacy, caste differences, prejudices concerning touchability and food”. 42

Further, he asks the same question to all Musalmans. Can they give up their trust in one Prophet, one book?

“The Musalmans should give up their exclusiveness, their blind trust in one Prophet and his book, their externalism in the performance of rites - pilgrimage to Mecca, fast and regulated prayers, their worship of saints (aulia and pirs) and prophets (paighambaras)”. 43
Kabir asked both Hindus and Muslims to have respect for all living beings and to refrain from violence and bloodshed. We can see it in the following lines:

“I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my body;

I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty everywhere.

Whatever I do, it becomes His worship. All I achieve is His service”.

Kabir says Hindus and Musalman are one as they worship same God. They are children of the same father, they are seeds of the same blood.

“All the men and women that are created are your form. Kabir is the son of Allah and Rama. He is his Guru and Pir”.

And

“The Hindu and Turk have one path which the True teacher has pointed out; says Kabir, hear ye saints, say Rama or say Khuda”.

And

“The religion of those who understand is one, whether they are Pandits or Shaikhs”.

Kabir’s was the first attempt to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. He was the first man to come forward to proclaim a religion of the centre. He took up the middle path. His attempt at reconciliation of Hinduism and Islam was subsequently taken up all over India. Akbar’s Din-i Ilahi was not an isolated whim of a ruler who had power. It was an inevitable result of the syncretic forces which were on the rise in India. We can find it in the teachings of Kabir.
The constructive part of Kabir’s mission is to turn the attention of the people of whole world to a religion of universal path. No Hindu or Muslim could take exception to such a religion. A way was found which both Hindu and Musalman could walk on together.

Dara Shukoh

Dara Shukoh’s is the second greatest name in the history of Indian syncratic thought. He was of the firm belief that the Absolute in the final analysis was one and same, and merely expressed in different forms in different religions. Each religion has its own language. There is the difference of languages not of absolute.

“Dara Shukoh implied that an appreciation of the subtleties of Tasawwuf in both Islamic Sufism and Hindu mysticism was the exclusive domain of the elite of both religions”.

According to Dara Shukoh, determination of the absolute took place in respect of purity or impurity.

“Self manifestation’ of the primal aspect of the Essence was ruh (atman or soul) and in its secondary aspect was known as jasd (sarir) that is, body”.

Dara Shukoh believed in the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud. Like all followers of Wahad al Wujud, he saw in the creater and created relationship a process of ascertainment of the Absolute. Absolute is known as Ruh-i Azam (super soul) in the state of the Ahadiyya (the abstract notion of Oneness).

“To Dara, Ruh-i Azam or Abul Arwah (soul of souls) was identical with Parmatma. Another analogy was taken from the inter-relationship between water and waves. The combination of waves in their complete aspect, he
believed, could be likened to Abul-Arwah or Paramatma, while ‘primeval water’ was like the Absolute.\(^{50}\)

The followers of the Wahdat al-Wujud believed that Ahadiyya or Abstract Oneness was most indeterminate of all indeterminate states of the Absolute, that is, the state preceded by what they called the state of Unity in plurality.

Jamal and Jalal were as the two of God’s attributes which human beings could perceive. Dara Shukoh believed in trigunas.

“Dara Shukoh identified the triguna (the three gunas or attributes in Hindu philosophy), sattva, rajas and tamas, with the beauty and majesty of God. To him, sattva was creation, rajas was duration and tamas was destruction. Dara Shukoh identified Brahman with jibra’il, Vishnu with Mika’il and Mahesvara (Siva) with Israfil.”\(^{51}\)

Dara Shukoh identified Allah with Sanskrit ‘Om’, Huwa (He) with Sah, firishta (angles) with divata, and the Mazhar-i Atam (Perfect Manifestation) with avatara. Through avatara, according to Dara Shukoh, Qudra (power of God) was manifested in such a way as would not have been manifested otherwise.

The mystical view of Islam comes from Dara’s interpretation of the ‘light verse’ in the Qur’an:

“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah giveth unto His light whom He will, and Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah’s knower of all things.”\(^{52}\)

Dara Shukoh says that this light verse of Qur’an is equivalent to Sanskrit verse.
“Allah is the light of the heaven and the earth’ was equivalent to the Sanskrit ‘Jyoti Svarupa’, Svaprakasa and Svapanaprakasa”.

Mutazila and Shi’is rejected the sufí theory of the vision of God on earth. They denied that people were able to see God. Dara Shukoh says that there is no contradiction between Sufi’s theory of the vision of God and the theory of His being.

“Dara Shukoh saw no contradiction between the sufí concept of the vision of the Divine and the theory of this being Absolute Essence, Ultimate principle and Unknowable; and he explained the lack of contradiction by reminding his readers that God, being Omnipotent, was potent enough to manifest Himself in any manner, any where and at any time.”

According to Dara, the following verse from the Qur’an stated this truth:

“Whoso is blind here will be blind in the hereafter, and yet further from the road”.

Dara says that Mahapralaya of the Hindu mystics and the Qiyamat (Resurrection) of the Muslim are same.

“To Dara Shukoh the equivalent of Vision of god to Hindu followers of the Unity of Being was Saksatkar, which was confirmed by the Vedas”.

In the Sufi cosmology, there were four spheres: ‘alam-i nasut (sphere of humanity), ‘alam-i jabarut (celestial world of Divine Names) and ‘alam-i lahut’ (sphere of the Godhead). Some other sufis considered five spheres, the fifth being alam-i misal (world of analogies). These concepts of spheres are equivalents to the Sanskrit terms of jagrat (nasut), svapna (malakut), susupti (jabarut) and turiya (lahut).
Dara Shukoh believed that the fourth Hindu sphere that is Turia is *lahut* (Godhead). He says that *lahut* (*Turia*) was identical with Being. It comprehended all the other three worlds.

“The spiritual journey of humans from the *nasut* to the *malakut*, from the *malakut* to the *jabarut* and from the *jabarut* to *lahut*, represented an ascent; likewise the Reality of Realities (which Hindus identified with Avasana, the Absolute) descended from the *lahut* to the *jabarut*, from the *jabarut* to the *malakut* and from the *malakut* to *nasut*.57

**Ramakrishna Paramhansa**

Ramakrishna Paramhansa was the pioneer of the modern universalist spirit in Hinduism. He was a true Hindu, and was ready at any moment to defend the whole of Hinduism.

“Rama Krishna regarded all deities as manifestation of the impersonal Supreme. He recognizes the goddess Kali as one of the chief manifestations of God. She was to him the divine mother of the Universe, and he worshipped her more than any other divinity. He worshipped her by means of idols; for he implicitly believed the Hindu doctrine that the divinity fills every one of his own idols with his presence. He also held the ordinary Hindu idea of the guru. Here is one of his sayings: “The disciple should never criticise his own Guru. He must implicitly obey whatever his Guru says”.58

Ramakrishna was a devout Hindu. He says that Christianity was demanding acceptance from Hindus. It claims to be the one religion for whole world. Islam was also present, but less active. He declared that all religions were true in their essence. All are identical. Each man should remain in the religion in which he is born.
The system of philosophy Ramakrishna followed was the monistic Vedanta as taught by Shankaracharya. But he also said that the doctrines of dualism, qualified monism and monism are stages of spiritual progress. They were not contradictory to each other. They are stages of evolution of human mind. The non-dual state of consciousness is the ultimate goal to be realized. It is a realisation which is beyond mind and speech. The stages up to non-dualism can not be understood by mind and intellect and expressed in words. In that state both the absolute and the relative are equally eternal. The Lord himself, his name and his abode – all are of pure consciousness. On the part of the ordinary human beings, in whom the attachment of worldly object prevails, dualism is commendable. For them, the loud singing of the Lord's name, His glory, His powers, etc. are advisable. One who has realized the nondual state becomes silent. Non-dualism is not a matter to be described. As soon as one tries to speak or say anything, dualism becomes inevitable.

According to Ramakrishna, the personal and impersonal aspects of God are not contradictory with each other but are the two aspects of the same reality. The same reality is viewed from different standpoints.

He further said that religion is a matter of realization. It concerns with realizing the unity that exists between God and man. He desired to attain the Vaishnava ideal of love for God. After that he desired to know and understand about the other religions like Islam and Christianity.

“He found a Mahommedan saint and went to live with him; he underwent the discipline prescribed by him, became a Mahommedan for the time being, lived like a Mohammedan, dressed like a Mohammedan, and did everything laid down in their codes”.
Further, he tried to understand Christianity,

"He had seen Jesus in a vision, and for three days he could think of nothing and speak of nothing but Jesus and His love".\textsuperscript{60}

Ramakrishna came to conclusion that all religions were true. All religions are simply various paths leading to the same goal. According to him,

"All religions are true and good; and, therefore, every man ought to remain in his own religion".\textsuperscript{61}

He says religion is realization of God. Different religions are different paths leading to the same goal. No religion is superior to any other religion.

"If religion properly so called is realization of God, it follows that all religions fulfilling such a condition are true. They are merely different paths leading to the same goal. Hence no religion is inferior or superior to any other religion. All are equally true. Thus we must not only respect or tolerate other religions, but must accept them. And if we accept different religions as true, we will have to accept the different concepts - personal and impersonal, with or without form – of God as equally true".\textsuperscript{62}

Ramakrishna recommended Bhakti Marga for man. Bhakti means complete devotion to God. Every moment thinking of God, seeing God in everything is true bhakti.

"Bhakti is to adore God with body, mind and words. With body means to serve and worship God with one’s hands, go to holy places with one’s feet, hear the chanting of the name and glory of God with one’s ears and behold the Divine image with one’s eyes; with mind means to contemplate and meditate on God constantly and to remember and to think of his lila. ‘With words’
means to sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories”.63

Ramakrishna spoke of Hinduism as a Universal and Eternal religion.

“The eternal religion, the religion of rishis, has been in existence from time out of mind and will exist eternally. There exists in this Sanatana dharma all forms of worship, worship of God with form and worship of impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths – paths of knowledge, devotion and so on. The other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then will disappear”.64

He said that God can be realized by every man. People do not understand this because of blind faith and rigid superstitions. He says that superstitions and conflicts are removed when man belongs to God. This awareness of God in all walks of life makes true salvation for every individual.