

RELIGION: TRUE AND FALSE

Greetings, my dearest friends. Blessings for all of you. Throughout the ages divine effort was focused on conveying true religion to humankind. That endeavor, however, was accompanied by an unavoidable reaction, not so much of anti-religion, as you may believe, but of false religion. This distortion is promoted by giving to falsehood the appearance of truth. If you follow the history of religion, you will be able to determine an obvious though gradual trend with many a relapse, leading from the false toward the true religion. Particularly in recent times, despite, or maybe because of all the upheaval and confusion, the trend is stronger than ever toward true religion.

What are the main differences between true and false religion? One of the main determinants is that in false religion obedience to authority is one of the great strongholds. In all religions -- in some more, and in others less -- the concept of obedience plays an important role. True religion does not obey. It is free. True religion is a willing process: a free, self-determined action, derived from understanding. It makes people act from their own conviction and never from fear, nor from the desire to please and appease a more powerful person, being, or authority.

Obedience to authority has been encouraged by exponents of religion under the half-true and only partly valid argument that humanity was too much enslaved by its passions to be let free. Therefore obedience had to be stressed in order to protect society.

Superficially this may seem right; in reality it is not. For although it is true that the overall development of humanity is not advanced enough to be free of destructive impulses, the laws to prevent such destruction need not be combined with religion. In other words, religion would not have to convey the idea of a stern God-authority in order to prevent crime. There are other means to effect that through civil law. Religion need not be distorted and truth obscured by encouraging humanity's weakest, sickest, and most immature tendencies. It is those tendencies that are exploited in order to maintain false religion.

You know by now, because of your work on this path, that one of your great struggles is overcoming the unconscious desire to remain a clinging, protected child, to refuse the apparent hardship of adulthood, self-responsibility, and independence. To the child in you it seems much better to remain helpless, to force the powerful adult world, or God, or any substitute for these two, to take on the responsibility for your life that you yourself should carry. The tremendously damaging effects that this hidden attitude has on the personality can be discovered only when it becomes conscious. But unconsciously you battle against this very awareness, wishfully thinking in your unconscious that the disadvantages of adulthood can be avoided by remaining a child, who at the same time refuses to face the tragic disadvantages of prolonged childhood. This soul-crippling attitude finally succeeds in really making you helpless, while the god-authority you desire to take over your responsibility is just not there. This, in turn, causes bitterness, rebellion, and a deep feeling of

injustice. You feel cheated. After all, you have obeyed, often to the letter. But, obedience of this sort always has the wrong motive: "If I obey, you will protect me. You will make decisions for me. I will not be held responsible and I will be rewarded with happiness for being an obedient little child." Since God does not "reward" such unhealthy attitudes, you must feel cheated. You cannot help but feel injustice in the world.

False religion has encouraged and capitalized on this very sick tendency. It has set up rules and dogmas, and has distorted the law into such a rigid concept that humans fell easily into this submissive and dependent attitude. False religion encouraged fear, dependency, helplessness, and a humiliating, though often very subtle, tendency to appease. This has the additional crippling effect of causing self-contempt and shame, which in turn often has to find outlets that become destructive toward others, as well as the self. Rebellion must follow this set of emotions.

Whenever fear, timidity, nonassertion, appeasement, and obedience predominate in a personality, rebellion must exist also. It may not be on the surface, but it must exist! There can be no doubt about it. It will be quite a battle to find this level of rebellion, bitterness, hostility, and aggression. This battle is caused by resistance to giving up the cherished self-image of the "good" person. The need for such "goodness" mostly stems from the hidden striving to remain a helpless child in order to make the grown-up world -- or God, or life, or human authority -- see the necessity of taking care of the child. And the child only "deserves" such benign care if it maintains its "goodness."

By the same token, if you encounter in a human being overemphasis on independence, hostile domineering tendencies, toughness, and denial of all laws and rules, you may be certain that fear, cringing appeasement, and helplessness also exist, though hidden from awareness. The shame surrounding these tendencies is so great that the outer personality takes on a false freedom and independence in a poor imitation of the real qualities. Because such people wish so strongly to avoid the struggle of life, they cringe like the predominantly fearful and appeasing type, but are ashamed of this weakness, as well as of the disappointment of not getting their way. Unconsciously, they feel alone. They feel rejected by God, by life, by human authority, and this shame must be hidden at all costs.

Both crude types -- often appearing in more subtle mixtures and combinations -- represent, of course, psychological deviations that can always be traced to parental influences and early experiences. It is also important to consider these manifestations from the spiritual and religious point of view, however. Complete awareness and understanding of these attitudes will show you how you inwardly deviate from your conscious beliefs.

So where there is outer religious faith, obedience, and appeasement, try to find not only the clinging helplessness, but also the hidden resentment that God has not come forth to provide you with what you need and want, to lead you by the hand, to make life right for you, to eliminate from this earth cruelty and injustice, suffering and pain. Such general complaints are often motivated by the inner subjective disappointment of not being "taken care of." When you find manifest rebellion and aggressiveness, a drive for overindependence, try to find deep down in you a wish for the strong hand of authority that is utterly good to you, and your disappointment that you could not find it.

It will be a part of your task in self-search to ascertain where false religion exists deep in your soul; where you borrow, as it were, religious precepts behind which you hide and excuse your childish tendencies to refuse to grow up.

Your conscious right opinions are worth very little when they are undermined by your unconscious beliefs. If you do not live, experience, and feel these right ideas, they become powerless. They are empty. Only when beliefs are incorporated at the emotional level, integrated in the whole character structure, will they have power. Whenever you wonder why things happen to you that run counter to your beliefs and the spiritual laws you know so well, you can be sure that, at least in some respect, you deviate inwardly. It will be your task to find how and how much you unconsciously deviate from your correct conscious opinions. While you may know perfectly well that God is neither a benign nor a hostile authority, that God has freed us and it is up to us to develop, you may often find that your emotions completely deviate from such knowledge.

Problems you carry through many incarnations and through your childhood are instrumental in bringing these unconscious conflicts to the surface. But so does the tendency of religion to encourage blind obedience. Both causes produce personalities distorted by helplessness, false goodness, and appeasement; or overindependence, rebellion, and false toughness; or a combination of both. In both instances you hide something and ardently try to prove to yourself and others that the hidden does not exist. In one case you hide the rebellion and hostility; in the other, you hide the helplessness and desire for protection, the tendency to appease and be falsely "good."

By finding, tracing, understanding, and resolving these distortions, you not only grow up and become a stronger and happier human being, you also contribute much more than you can possibly perceive at the moment toward the elimination of false religion and its substitution by real religion in the world at large.

Obedience, as false religion encourages and teaches it, is completely incompatible with the idea that a free human being can attain divinity. Once blind obedience is eliminated from religion and from the soul of the individual, rebellion against what is truly good, wise, and loving in religion will cease because religion will lose that tinge of hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness that it so often has for a number of individuals. True religion, genuine spirituality, aims primarily to make you free, to make you strong, to make you responsible so that you do not wait for justice to be dished out to you, but discover your own justice. With the wrong attitude, you not only fail to eliminate your self-imposed helplessness, you encourage it, as well as encouraging false religion, even if the weakness and clinging to authority happens to take a consciously secular form. Thus you must see that such immaturity and soul deviations play hand in hand with false authoritarian religion. Anything false always brings an equally false countermeasure.

So, find in what subtle, deeply hidden recesses of your soul you expect God to live for you; to make decisions for you; to bring desired results for you; to give you what you could get for yourself if only you decided to become free and mature. Find in yourself this element that is more harmful than you now can realize. You cripple yourself with this hidden attitude. And you make a false crutch out of the truth.

False religion does more harm to true religion than complete atheism and materialism because it makes a farce of truth, of the dignity of the freedom and divine strength in humanity. It puts a

powerful argument into the mouths of the antireligionists. So it becomes very important that you find where you continue to cling because you are afraid of standing on your own two feet. You may at first wonder how to go about finding this element in yourself. I say it does not matter where you begin if you focus on this goal. Take any negative emotion: envy, bitterness, fear, helplessness -- and most indicative of all, self-pity. Once you ascertain these feelings, it will not be so difficult to find where you cling to spiritual and emotional infancy. Search in this direction even if you believe this doesn't apply to you. If you really want to find the truth you will. You always have. Once you have found this unconscious insistence on remaining a helpless child, you will soon come to see that it is responsible for your weakness, your helplessness, your enduring fear of life. But you combat this discovery by making yourself even more helpless, more fearful, and weaker. Once you truly see and understand this, you will begin to change -- and your strength will grow. You will no longer hope for God to give you what you should and could be strong enough to obtain for yourself. And this will give you self-respect and security. While you cling to a stronger authority than yourself in order to avoid effort and responsibility, you cannot help feeling self-hate and self-contempt, and you become weaker and more helpless.

Such a relation to authority can take the form of a vague sense that the world at large must be appeased. This can be felt also toward certain people, or it can actually be your concept of God, which then leads to the God-image I have discussed before.* False religion and your unconscious insistence on remaining an infant combine to produce this God-image.

In the transitional state between giving up false religion and embracing true religion, there comes a phase of nothingness. It is a difficult phase indeed. It is a phase in which you feel alone because the false god is dissolving and the true God can not yet take hold of your being. In this phase all your faith may begin to crumble. You may be full of doubts about the very existence of God. This is the consequence of eliminating the false security, the escape, the crutch that are part of spiritual infancy. Since the god of your childish concept indeed does not exist, God Himself appears temporarily not to exist at all.

But as the false religion and its God-image vanish, even while you feel temporarily alone, an inner force begins to grow in you, long before you become aware of it -- provided, of course, you are not thrown by this temporary state, but continue to work. You need to be willing to take it upon yourself to become whole, strong, and self-reliant. You have to determine not to allow this temporary state to crush you into abdicating life and struggle. If you fall into such a state, you cannot come out a free, strong individual. You may again fall back into the misleading, shallow comfort of false religion. If you develop your own strength for the very reason that you feel alone, then you will be victorious, and the road to true religion will be paved by your own attitude and effort. This is the only way you can let go of the phantom-god and develop the real God -- freedom within. The way to Him is through accepting aloneness. Such acceptance will strengthen the independence and self-responsibility essential to the God-creature you wish to become.

If you understand these words, not only intellectually and superficially, but after working for a while and coming across corresponding emotions, trends, and reactions within yourself, you will understand two things a lot better than before. One is the lecture on duality.** Accepting death and the unknown is the only prerequisite for accepting life and happiness -- not accepting death with a wishful-thinking spirituality, by avoiding your fears and doubts; not by using religion as a crutch to support you in the face of fear and aloneness, but recognizing and bravely encountering them. Only

then can true religion and knowledge replace the false religion of escape and the vague beliefs that serve only to cover up your fear.

There is a mutuality here. Accepting death and the unknown is connected with acceptance of independence and self-responsibility. Both indicate spiritual and emotional adulthood, freedom, growth, creativity, strength, trust in the self, and real security. The emotional climate of false religion can be expressed in these words: "I am a weak, helpless sinner. I can do nothing without God, without an authority who permits me to be happy. This God has the right to be good or bad to me. But if I obey and appease, chances are that he will be well disposed toward me, or so I hope."

From a sense of humiliation you will develop humility. From clinging appeasement and blind obedience -- often without understanding -- you will develop into a strong self-responsible being, trusting in your own capacity to obtain what you need in life. You need the courage now to let go of the illusion of false religion, of false consolation. And in this transitory state, if you go through it, your strength will come from the truth.

The second point is the reason why I have often emphasized for quite some time the psychological rather than the spiritual point of view. For none of you are free of the distortion of spirituality; namely, its use as escape, as a substitute for your weaknesses, as a consolation for your fears, as an attempt to appease God to get what you could easily obtain by your own efforts. When religion is a substitute, it may help for a while. It may assuage unreasonable fear. But in the long run, it cripples you and your growth. I sometimes have to refrain from stating a spiritual truth directly because your subconscious would misunderstand and misuse it. But the more problems you resolve, the safer it becomes to tell you the truth without the danger of reinforcing in you the tendency to succumb to false religion. Then true religion will come out of your own strength, not out of dogma. It will come from within and not, as you now unconsciously expect it, from without.

Developing your own resources and strengths instead of obtaining them from a being outside of yourself is no less divine. Quite the contrary. With this understanding, you will not mind my returning occasionally to a more spiritual approach to see where the psychological deviations -- the images, the distortions, the wrong conclusions, the false solutions -- directly contradict the spirituality that you all aim for. Then, and only then, will you fully understand that these are not two unrelated subjects: one is an integral part of the other.

Now, my friends, are there any questions regarding this topic?

QUESTION: Could you explain what true religion is, as compared to the wrong attitude? Where does belief in God come in if you don't feel He is a help? I just don't quite follow this.

ANSWER: You will feel that God is a help when you come to true religion after abandoning the crutch, but in a completely different sense. Now you need God's help because you make yourself helpless. Then you will feel God's help because you will perceive the perfection of the universe and its laws, of which you are an integral, contributing part. You will feel that you are the driving force of your life. You can help yourself if you really want to, if you are ready to sacrifice something.

Let us say, you want happiness in a certain direction -- and this is not some vague feeling, but a clearly defined goal. You will seek and find how you have prevented this happiness so far and what you can now do to obtain it by your own endeavors. You will understand what this demands of you, and it will be up to you either to fulfill these demands because you decide they are worthwhile or abstain from them. But there will not be a gnawing feeling in your soul that you are a neglected and unjustly treated child. True religion is spiritual and emotional maturity. God's role is not to provide you with things you do not wish to obtain for yourself. But the God-consciousness will reveal to you that His world is wonderful and that you have much more power than you have yet realized, if only you set it in motion by removing your own obstacles to fulfillment.

The false religious attitude arises when you ask God to help you overcome a hardship in your life and then you sit down and wait. You do not examine sufficiently why you have this hardship. You may do so peremptorily, because someone else in authority has told you to do so. But even while you attempt this examination, you tend to try to prove that you have nothing to do with the hardship. It has just fallen upon you undeservedly, and there is no way of getting out of it unless God intervenes with an act of grace. You do not muster the inner will and stamina to find how you can really get what you want out of your own creativity.

God is in you. The divine forces are in you if you mobilize them, rather than wait for them to come in from the outside. And the mobilization of these forces can happen only if you let go of some damaging attitude, something destructive that, again, is up to you to find. The strength and security coming from this attitude will give you an entirely different relationship to God, as well as an entirely different God-concept. Emotionally, the words may often remain the same but the concept and the inner climate will be different.

The words are often the same for both true and false religion, but the inner experience is entirely different. Both the false and the true religions say that God's grace exists. Even though you are on your own, the grace still exists. But this understanding will not come until you assume responsibility for yourself. As long as you expect God's grace to make up for your human laziness and greed, you must be disappointed, whether or not you admit this to yourself. So you become hurt and angry and rebellious. You then either turn away from God altogether, denying His very existence in the universe, or you consider yourself an isolated case of neglect, partly unworthy of His grace and help and partly unjustly treated. So you wallow in guilt and self-pity. This makes you more dependent and helpless -- and so the vicious circle continues in atoning for your rebellion against God by appeasing Him even more with fearful obedience that is entirely on the surface and caused by the sickest motivations.

QUESTION: I understand. But how can we go about it? This God-image is so embedded in us after so many decades of learning the false attitude. Wouldn't prayer change too if we discarded this concept? Wouldn't everything change?

ANSWER: Yes, of course. But you see, my child, you cannot say, "Now I will discard my God-image." It is not something you can simply decide in your mind. It does not work that way. Its emotional impact would remain if you tried to change it by a mere outer decision. In order to make an inner decision, the procedure has to be the same it has always been in this work. Find these attitudes and understand them more fully. If this is done deeply, not just superficially, you will all be surprised to find how far you have gone to forcefully perpetuate infancy. Once you analyze and

understand certain emotional behavior patterns, you will realize how preposterous they are; how incompatible with your conscious belief; how contrary to your own best interests; how logically impossible. After seeing and understanding all this, the change happens organically, by itself, as it were. A certain period of self-observation is necessary in order to gain full insight and then be able to change.

You must find these subtle and unobtrusive emotional reactions. They are neither obvious nor strong. Nor are they completely unconscious. They are there but they are subtle, and you are so used to them that you do not even see anything amiss. To find them and analyze them is the first step, and then see them in light of this discussion. This will help to dissolve the God-image because your attitude will naturally change. You will, for instance, find what your expectations really are, how you inwardly complain. You will find what you yourself could do to make these expectations a reality, and you will understand why you have not done so. This should be the procedure.

The very fact that you are aware of this God-image makes you extremely fortunate; many others are not aware of it at all. They are convinced they do not have any distortion in this respect. They do not connect certain emotional reactions with this God-image, with the false religious attitude. They are filled with their conscious right beliefs, while their unconscious concepts are still too far from awareness.

QUESTION: What religion is farthest away from the truth?

ANSWER: One cannot make such a statement. It may be that one religious denomination has more truthful teachings, but another that has fewer may, in its overall attitude, be closer to truth. Apart from being dangerous to draw such comparisons, the question is not important.

QUESTION: One of the last words of Christ was, "Father, Thy will be done." Taken as an example, this could have meant obedience, or it could have meant freedom.

ANSWER: Exactly. As I said before, the words are often the same. Truth can so easily be misinterpreted because the essence of truth is the willingness and capacity to understand. For example, from what I have discussed tonight, you could easily infer that there can be no grace of God. If you are supposed to be free and independent, where does grace come in? You would not even need it. This is not true. Grace does exist. But no words can convey the concept of grace unless you have first reached this true inner religious experience. When you no longer need grace as a substitute for your own weakness, when you do not make an asset out of your weakness, then you will become strong. For a while you will live without any understanding of grace, but then the true concept will dawn on you. In other words, this interim state of aloneness must first be experienced. The great mystics designate it as the "dark night of the soul."

The saying you just mentioned, "Thy will be done," means, rightly understood, "I let go of my small self-will, of my limited outlook, and I open myself so that the divine can come to me." It will not come from without but from within, as a deep knowledge and certainty, but only if you will not disassociate yourself from this realization. Experience of unity with the divine can happen only if you learn to let go, if you cease to be rigid.

The false meaning of "Thy will be done" makes humanity seem weak and stupid, so that you need another being to act and decide instead of you. This other being is often a human authority or church authority claiming to act on behalf of God. "Thy will be done" does not mean obedience; it means opening yourself to the fullest possible extent so that the greater wisdom will become a part of you.

QUESTION: From what you say, it becomes clear that religion is a matter of each individual soul developing to its optimum point by way of search and self-realization. The Churches have played a dominant role for many years, however, so it would seem that their function would eventually fall away.

ANSWER: Yes, indeed it will. When more people follow a path of self-recognition, growing and developing their own resources, they will no longer need authority. As for those who are not yet far enough in their development, human law will suffice to protect society from their untamed and destructive impulses. The truly divine can function only in free souls, and this will happen. The whole trend of history points in this direction.

QUESTION: You spoke about companionship. At times one has to be alone. How can you tell when that's appropriate?

ANSWER: There is a simple answer to that, although it's not always easy to know. When you investigate your emotional reactions and find that you want companionship out of fear of being alone, then the need for companionship springs, at least partly, from a poor motive. If you want to be alone out of fear of involvement because you have a strong tendency to withdraw, then your desire to be alone springs, again at least in part, from a poor motive. In other words, either tendency can be healthy as well as unhealthy. An integrated human being needs both companionship and solitude, and both for constructive reasons, rather than to avoid something you fear. The right answer can come only from rigorous self-examination.

More and more, you will see that truth cannot be stated as a rigid law. It always depends on how you feel and what the underlying motives are.

QUESTION: I try to find words to express my inner conflicts. The words seem exaggerated. How can I keep my words level with what I find in my search?

ANSWER: First of all, you will have to understand better the reason for your self-dramatization. Once you understand that, the need will lessen. There will be a more proportionate relationship between your words and your feelings. Again, the remedy is not to use self-discipline to stop this. Even if you should succeed, another, perhaps more harmful, symptom will come forth. Rather, use such manifestations as the useful symptoms they are.

QUESTION: Can I do it in trying to evaluate the words?

ANSWER: Certainly. That would be part of your private work: which words you use and why.

QUESTION: Often it is very easy for one subconscious to communicate with another. But there are times when there is such a strong barrier that one cannot penetrate. The other person asks for the answer yet doesn't listen, and you fail to convey your message.

ANSWER: Such people want only a qualified answer; that is, an answer compatible with their defenses. They do not want an answer that they find unpleasant. This would cause an inner resistance so strong that they could not hear your call. They cannot absorb what is being said to them. The attitude toward a person in this frame of mind is not to try to force the issue. The more you want to penetrate the resistance, the more frustration and impatience you will feel. And this is bound to affect the other person and increase the resistance even more. Moreover, it will be extremely useful to analyze the reason for your own frustration and impatience. It may be more than the goodwill to help. In some way your sense of competence may be involved. Or the other's acceptance of the truth may have an urgency for you that is not realistic. Whenever such currents exist, a mutually negative effect is established that worsens the inner problems of both parties. But finding what inner hidden role you play will be beneficial, possibly even for both parties. If you had no negative or problematic tendencies, you could easily accept another person's limitation. You know that. Now, this is a general answer, applying to many.

If there is anything unclear in what I discussed tonight, I will be only too glad to elaborate on it next time.

May these words raise echoes in your emotions. As you let this lecture affect you, it will stir up so much! This is good. I go from you with all our blessings for the coming year for the work that is before you. Yes, help is given to you, but do try to recognize that you might perceive it as coming from outside, unconnected with your own endeavors and strivings, and not as something that you mobilize, first of all, in yourself.

With this, my dearest ones, be blessed! Love and peace unto all of you. Be in God!

* Lecture #52, The God Image

** Lecture #81, Conflicts in the World of Duality

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