

Chapter 15

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

-- Jesus of Nazareth

Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.

-- Confucius

For ten or fifteen minutes we walked in silence. Everything I had learned and believed seemed to be threatened but for some reason I did not feel sad. What we had discussed and the way we had used a specific criteria for determining truth, I felt at ease knowing that my questions were finally being answered. Religion and God were finally beginning to make sense.

“Taking what we have learned in this discussion, is there a new theology based on our perceived knowledge of God? Are we to discard all that we have believed and followed for centuries?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “there is no new theology, only a very old one. One that proclaims that regardless of what other gods or angels there might be, there exists one true and unimaginable Deity that created and permeates the universe. It is an ideology that recognizes that we are a unified creation, made one through the presence of this unbelievably intelligent and creative Energy in our lives. It is an ancient theology that reminds us that we are the caretakers of the world and we are responsible for everything living in it. This Deity has no name. It is by giving this indescribable Being a name that we have created such division as exists in the world today. Do we believe in God, or Jehovah, or Allah, or Brahman? What we call this amazing Existence doesn’t matter, the Great Spirit is the same no matter what we choose to call It.”

“That sounds like a simple philosophy.”

“It is, and yet it is extremely difficult to adhere to such a simple creed.”

“Why is that?”

“It’s much more difficult to follow the simple teaching to love or care for one another than it is to follow a more detailed list of what that love includes. You see, if we have a detailed definition of what love means, we can always find loopholes that will allow us to act the way we want, justifying our actions by manipulating the definition. However, if we simply say that we are to care for others, it is all-inclusive and there are no loopholes. It simply means that we are to care for all people, in all places, in all circumstances. In addition, if we are given a set of rules, we can concentrate on satisfying the rules as they are stated and disregard going beyond the rules by participating in activities that we know we should participate in but don’t because they are not listed in the formal set of rules that we have chosen to follow.”

“You mean we follow the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law?” I summarized.

“Exactly,” he agreed.

“So, under this theology do we discard the old: the rituals, the celebrations, the formalities?” I asked.

“No. Not necessarily. These are not bad things. As you mentioned, they help remind us to be thankful for what we have been given. But, we must always be cognizant of participating sincerely and not just mechanically. Celebrations and rituals are part of life and religion. They are good as long as they do not become the focus of life and religion.

“Remember when I said that there is truth in all of the religions? And, I said that God has protected Its message to the world?”

“I do.”

“There are amazing commonalities in the ancient documents as well in the teachings of all great prophets and philosophers. These commonalities are the teachings that God has protected and passed down to us throughout history, the

truth. If we carefully study these documents, as well as the works of other prophets and philosophers, there seems to be one essential teaching. It may be said a little differently, but it all means the same thing: Jesus said,

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁷¹

In the Koran it is stated:

‘It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the God-fearing.’⁷²

And again,

‘Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds for them will Allah bring about love.’⁷³

Confucius said,

‘Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.’”

“So, what are you saying? What is the truth?”

“What I am saying is this,” he clarified. “if we examine those teachings that are common in the ancient sacred writings and we evaluate their consistency with what nature tells us about

⁷¹ Bible, Matthew 22: 37-39

⁷² Koran 2:177

⁷³ Koran 19:96

God, then we should find that truth, or at least, that part of the truth that we can actually understand. The basic truth that will make life better for all of us.”

“So, once again you are suggesting that I need to read all of those ancient sacred documents to find truth?” I asked.

“Not all of them, perhaps. But there is a wealth of wisdom contained in their pages. If I were going to begin with the basic writings, though, I would recommend the basic Upanishads that include the Isha, Katha, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Shvetashvatara, Mundaka, Mandukya, Kena, Prashna, Taittiriya, Attareya, Tejobindu, Atma, Amritabindu and Paramahansa. There is so much wisdom and inspiration in those writings that they will have an impact on your life if they are studied sincerely. Then read the Bible, the Dhammapada, the teachings of Buddha, and the great philosophers. Be careful to look for the lessons being taught in the various stories and don’t get caught up in the accuracy of the details of the story itself. Concentrate on those teachings that concern themselves with relationships and that are consistent with what nature tells us about God. But, always remember that religion should still be as simple as it was when the Creator first introduced Himself to those early primitive humans. And, don’t forget that it all boils down to two guidelines: love the inconceivable God, not because God demands it or needs it, but because we should want to worship this great and mighty God out of awe and thankfulness; and, the second, love others. This includes all of God’s creation: other people, as well as the world and every natural thing in it. If everyone observed these two guidelines, there would be no hunger, no war, and no prisons. Isaac Newton believed that religion was originally very basic. In his book, the *Philosophical Origins of Gentile Theology*, he believed that Noah had founded the primordial religion that had been free from superstition and had advocated a rational worship of one God. The only commandments were love of God and love of neighbor; where Nature was the only temple.⁷⁴ Another great philosopher,

⁷⁴ Armstrong, p. 305

Francois-Marie de Voltaire a major contributor to the Enlightenment, also thought that religion should be very simple. In his book, *Philosophical Dictionary*, he writes of religion:

‘Would it not be that which taught much morality and very little dogma? That which tended to make men just without making them absurd? That which did not order one to believe in things that are impossible, contradictory, injurious to divinity, and pernicious to mankind, and which dared not menace with eternal punishment anyone possessing common sense? Would it not be that which did not uphold its belief with executioners, and did not inundate the earth with blood on account of unintelligible sophism?...which taught only the worship of one god, justice, tolerance and humanity?’”⁷⁵

“And then listen to everyone who speaks to you. Remember that truth can come from anywhere. Even an idiot can utter words of wisdom.”

“But what about the hundreds of laws that we read about in the Bible and all of those that are outlined in the Koran?” I asked.

“Those are man’s rules designed, for the most part, to make the particular faction or sect for whom the scriptures were written unique from other tribes or sects. All of the social rules listed in all religious teaching are an attempt to elaborate on those two basic rules that we have mentioned. If one clearly understands what it means to love or be concerned about our world and our community, to face life logically and with concern for others, all other rules and laws could be eliminated. And, as for the religious rules like meeting at the temple, or giving of one’s resources to help others, or praying facing a certain direction or at specific times of day, are unnecessary. They are an attempt to make a certain religion different because their rules are different. They are an attempt to make God exclusive. God

⁷⁵ Francois-Marie de Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Theodore Besterman (London, 1972), p.357

cannot be limited to those kinds of rules. We are free to worship God in our own way. After all, the Almighty God is in us all, as close to us as our own being. God permeates the universe and everything in it. God is infinitely free and we should be, as well."

"You really believe that it comes down to love God and others? But this is common sense! Did we have to make this entire journey just to arrive at this obvious conclusion?" I asked.

"Yes, it is common sense. But even common sense must sometimes be tested. And, along this journey, we have discovered much deception that is intended to keep people bound by guilt and repressed by rules and frightened by the threat of punishment. Religion should make us free, just as God is free. When we realize this freedom and the power that exists within us, then we will experience the liberation and potential that is available to everyone. The possibilities of what we can accomplish are endless. And, the peace and satisfaction that comes from the freedom that we can have with this indescribable Deity is overwhelming."

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small, thin booklet.

"I carry this little book with me everywhere I go," he said. "I have written down many of the verses and quotes that speak to me in a special way. I guess you could say it's my Bible."

He thumbed through the pages.

"This writing from the Hindus is a lengthy discourse, but it's filled with power and wisdom. Listen to what the writer says in the Paramahansa Upanishad. When a seeker asks the Lord of Love what are the characteristics of a person who has discovered the truth and become illumined or enlightened, the Lord replies:

‘ ...He has renounced all selfish attachments
And observes no rites and ceremonies.
He has only minimum possessions,
And lives his life for the welfare of all.
He has no staff nor tuft nor sacred thread.

He faces hot and cold, pleasure and pain,
 Honor and dishonor with equal calm.
 He is not affected by calumny,
 Pride, jealousy, status, joy, or sorrow,
 Greed, anger, or infatuation,
 Excitement, egoism, or other goads;
 For he knows he is neither body or mind.
 Free from the sway of doubt and false knowledge,
 He lives united with the Lord of Love,
 Who is ever serene, immutable,
 Indivisible, the source of all joy
 And wisdom. The Lord is true home,
 His pilgrim's tuft of hair, his sacred thread;
 For he has entered into a unitive state.

Having renounced every selfish desire,
 He has found his rest in the Lord of Love.
 Wisdom is the staff that supports him now.
 ...The aspirant who is seeking the Lord
 must free himself from selfish attachments
 to people, money, and possessions.
 When his mind sheds every selfish desire,
 He becomes free from the duality
 Of pleasure and pain and rules his senses.
 No more is he capable of ill will;
 No more is he subject to elation,
 For his senses come to rest in the Self.
 Entering into the unitive state,
 He attains the goal of evolution.
 Truly, he attains the goal of evolution.⁷⁶

He closed the book. I took a deep breath. Again today the
 air was fresh with the smell of cedars.

⁷⁶ *The Paramahansa Upanishad.*