

THE OLD PAST MASTER
SRI RAMAKRISHNA
[1836 - 1886]



Sri Ramakrishna, was one of the greatest spiritual teachers produced in India. His short life, dedicated solely to the pursuit of God-consciousness, represents the very core of the spiritual realizations of the seers and sages of India. He reached a depth of God-consciousness that transcends all time and place and has a universal appeal. Seekers of God of all religions feel irresistibly drawn to his life and teachings. He founded no cult, nor showed any new path to salvation. His message was his consciousness of God. Drawn by the magnetism of Sri Ramakrishna's personality, people flocked to him from far and near -- men and women, young and old, philosophers and theologians, philanthropists and humanists, atheists and agnostics, Hindus and Brahmins, Christians and Muslims, seekers of truth of all races, creeds and castes.

As Masons, we are to spread the broad mantle of tolerance over all our actions, to regard the whole human species as one family, and use Masonry as a center to unite those who might otherwise never have met – forming a universal brotherhood under the fatherhood of God the Creator, or as we say, the GAOTU.

As Masons, we are not to discuss religion in the Lodge. This is a misconstruction of our ancient laws. What we are not supposed to do is engage in private piques and quarrels – far less any quarrels about religion. The Anderson Constitution adopted by the Grand Lodge of the Moderns in 1723, eliminated the requirement that the members share any particular religion, that being a matter of their own preference, but that they be good men and true and in agreement with the natural religion to which all men can agree.

This certainly does not mean that we can not inform ourselves about other religions, or seek to reconcile one with the other by looking to those core precepts which are common to all religions – because it is the misinterpretations emphasized by the “fundamentalists” which are divisive and should not be used, one against the other. As each candidate is obligated on his own volume of the sacred law, I believe that it behooves us to inform ourselves as to those core precepts of other religions so we may better understand the cultural mindset of our brethren of a different religion than that which we individually profess.

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The great contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world is his message of the harmony of religions. To him, all religions are the revelation of God in His diverse aspects to satisfy the manifold demands of human minds. Like different photographs of a building taken from different angles, different religions give us the pictures of one truth from different standpoints. They are not contradictory but complementary. It is said that there are many paths leading to the top of the mountain, but they all lead to the top of the mountain. The paths vary, but the goal remains the same. Harmony of religions is not uniformity; it is unity in diversity. It is not a fusion of religions, but a fellowship of religions based on their common goal -- communion with God. This harmony is to be realized by deepening our individual God-consciousness, through a better understanding of ourselves. – which, as we have seen, is the message of the Blue Lodge degrees, culminating in the Holy Royal Arch.

To give you a sense of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, please consider his following message: “God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole hearted devotion. One may eat a cake with icing either straight or sidewise. It will taste sweet either way.

As one and the same material, water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third aqua, and another pani, so the one Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Jehovah, and by others as Brahman.

As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of these ways.

Bow down and worship where others kneel, for where so many have been paying the tribute of adoration the kind Lord must manifest himself, for he is all mercy.

The devotee who has seen God in one aspect only, knows him in that aspect alone. But he who has seen him in manifold aspects is alone in a position to say, “All these forms are of one God and God is multiform.” He is formless and with form, and many are his forms which no one knows.

The Savior is the messenger of God. He is like the viceroy of a mighty monarch. As when there is some disturbance in a far-off province, the king sends his viceroy to quell it, so wherever there is a decline of religion in any part of the world, God sends his Savior there. It is one and the same Savior that, having plunged into the ocean of life, rises up in one place and is known as Krishna (the leading Hindu incarnation of God), and diving down again rises in another place and is known as Christ.

Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mohammedan should follow Mohammedanism, and so on. For the Hindus the ancient path, the path of the Aryan sages, is the best.

People partition off their lands by means of boundaries, but no one can partition off the all-embracing sky overhead. The indivisible sky surrounds all and includes all. So common man in ignorance says, “My religion is the only one, my religion is the best.” But when his heart is

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illuminated by true knowledge, he knows that above all these wars of sects and sectarians presides the one indivisible, eternal, all-knowing bliss.

As a mother, in nursing her sick children, gives rice and curry to one, and sago arrowroot to another, and bread and butter to a third, so the Lord has laid out different paths for different men suitable to their natures.

Dispute not. As you rest firmly on your own faith and opinion, allow others also the equal liberty to stand by their own faiths and opinions. By mere disputation you will never succeed in convincing another of his error. When the grace of God descends on him, each one will understand his own mistakes.

There was a man who worshiped Shiva but hated all other deities. One day Shiva appeared to him and said, 'I shall never be pleased with thee so long as thou hatest the other gods.' But the man was inexorable. After a few days Shiva again appeared to him and said, 'I shall never be pleased with thee so long as thou hatest.' The man kept silent. After a few days Shiva again appeared to him. This time one side of his body was that of Shiva, and the other side that of Vishnu. The man was half pleased and half displeased. He laid his offerings on the side representing Shiva, and did not offer anything to the side representing Vishnu. Then Shiva said, 'Thy bigotry is unconquerable. I, by assuming this dual aspect, tried to convince thee that all gods and goddesses are but various aspects of the one Absolute Brahman.'

And so may we all be united on the center. So mote it be.

FRATERNALLY AND FONDLY,
JOHN D. NELSON, P.M.